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The HEART of a CHILD

by

FRANK DANBY


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THE HEART OF A CHILD

THE HEART OF A CHILD

BEING PASSAGES FROM THE EARLY LIFE OF SALLY SNAPE LADY KIDDERMINSTER

BY

FRANK DANBY

AUTHOR OF "PIGS IN CLOVER," "THE SPHINX'S LAWYER," "BACCARAT," ETC.

"Till this one change hath found us,
The hours their glass forget:
The old arms linger round us,
The child heart holds us yet."

NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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Set up and electrotyped. Published March, 1908. Reprinted April, twice; May, twice; June, July, August, September, October, 1908; June, 1909; January, February, November, 1910.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

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THE HEART OF A CHILD

CHAPTER I

IN Angel Gardens, Limehouse, the spring sun had less opportunity than anywhere else in the whole of London. It was a narrow, filthy, ill-paved *cul-de-sac*. On either side of its foul gutters were tottering, low tenement houses, the fronts bulging, the broken windows filled in with rags or paper, the roofs rotting. There was a swarming life of women and children on doorsteps, and in the roadway—ragged, wretched, appallingly dirty. Brooding over all was that close, oppressive stench which tells of dirt and poverty.

Yet here, on that May day, ten years ago, the organ-grinder turned his tune, and, with shoeless feet, or feet worse than shoeless, in men's boots, carpet slippers, gaping, ragged gear of every description, the draggle-tailed children danced. And they danced well, now a reel, now a polka, now a valse, not the latest fashionable variety perhaps, but always in strict time, with never a step missed, and a sense of gaiety and abandonment, amazing to the district visitor, new to her work, and already heart-sick with what she had seen and heard that spring afternoon.

On a heap of rags on the floor in the first house she had entered, it was the first entry on the list given to her, there lay a dying woman. One saw the skull behind the

emaciation of her yellow, tortured face. Three or four infant children stared wearedly, and cried fitfully, during the lady's short visit. But the invalid welcomed her visitor quite warmly. She said she could not move about much, and she liked a bit of a gossip. Would the lady come and sit over by her bed? There was a bit of a packing-case that would do nicely for a chair. Like all her class, she had been quite ready to talk about herself. She said she had nine children altogether. The eldest was twelve, he worked at a shop, a half-timer, he was very lucky to get the place; a good boy, he brought his half-crown home every week, "as reg'lar, as reg'lar." Jenny, she helped too, although she was only eleven, door-stepping; many and many a morning she earned her fourpence before she went to school. And then her husband's club had come forward, she went on: "he was a stevedore before he was killed":

"They give me something still, his club does, there's many worse off than me. And we got a good neighbour. Since I can't move my legs, she comes in, most every morning, and 'elps with the children. She brings 'em little things too."

"'The pain'? Oh! yes, 'tis pretty bad, but lying here like this it don't matter so much, 'aving so much done for me, and the children so good, and everybody so kind; I mustn't grumble at a bit of pain."

Her strained eyes and grey mouth made the pathos of her gratitude acute.

The district visitor interviewed the good neighbour, who lived in the attic overhead, and lately had two of Mrs. Crowe's children in to sleep with her. This row of houses must have been built a hundred years ago. They were not on the usual London plan, they ran back a good way, but were only on two floors, incredibly rotten and insani-

tary. They had been condemned over and over again, but still stood.

Mrs. Evans' attic was very clean, the bed had a patch work quilt, there was a bit of looking-glass nailed to the wall, also a couple of texts. She was not on the list from the Charity Organization Society; it was only to ask about Mrs. Crowe that Ursula Rugeley went up. But when she had put her questions and received her answers, something prompted her to say a few appreciative words. Miss Rugeley said she hoped the society she represented would do something for Mrs. Crowe and her family, it was a very rich society. But she realized that whilst she was hoping, and the Society had been making inquiries, Mrs. Evans worked quietly and continuously for her poor neighbour.

"Lor' bless you, 'tis nothing, what I do. Lots of folks do more than me. The poor thing's dying of cancer, the pain's awful, I know that. My mother died of it, you could hear her shrieks two streets off. Mrs. Crowe, she don't make a murmur. I never see such patience, never. Glad I am if I can help a bit. Me? No! I don't want no 'elp."

All the time she was talking, her busy fingers were plying her knitting needles.

"I can earn a good fourteen shillings a week, if I keep at it, and if I spare her two or three out of that, it won't hurt me. Save! I never was one to save. I don't 'old with it myself. Meanness, I call it. I'd rather go on the parish when I couldn't work no more, than grudge me neighbour a bite or sup when I 'ad it. And there is One who'll look after me," she added, quite unaffectedly, with deep conviction.

Ursula Rugeley was learning more than she was teaching, receiving more than she was giving. Great lessons of patience, generosity, resignation were being given her.

The second name on her list was Tom Bolding. Tom

Bolding occupied the back-floor room next door. It was almost always dark in Tom Bolding's room, for the big new houses had been built so close. Angel Gardens had been long condemned; architect and builder were within their right in concluding that the order for its destruction had been obeyed. There was an old cesspool right under Tom Bolding's window, but, as the window was never opened, that was little inconvenience.

Tom Bolding, when he rose from the pallet bed, and greeted Ursula in a strange voice, revealed himself a tall, gaunt man; she had heard his short painful breath even before she opened the door. One could see the skeleton, too, in his fleshless face, his eyes were caverns behind the high cheek bones. It seemed as if it were from a cavern, too, that the hoarse voice came.

"Be pleased to come in, marm," he said, panting politely. "Polly, get the lady a chair."

Polly and her sister had each a broken-backed chair, Polly's was given up with mute obedience. They had not time to waste on a visitor, they were making potato sacks; two half-naked children, hardly human. A heap of sacks lay in a corner, and on that heap Polly sat, when she had given up her chair, so that she might go on with her work without delay. They never looked up during the conversation that followed; their eyes never left the coarse sacking, the rough thread, the large needles.

"They can get through thirty in a day, if they don't 'ave to go to school," said the father proudly, in that curious voice of his. "And we've had luck, mum, for Sukey has a bad leg; show the lady yer leg, Suke."

It was a mass of festering sore. Ursula turned from it shuddering, but it seemed a matter of indifference to Sukey, who covered it up again as well as she was able with her short scant skirt, and went on with her sewing.

"And Polly, 'ere, is only just off the measles. Yer eyes are still bad, ain't they, Poll? They get fourpence a dozen for sewing them sacks, though of course the thread and things cóme expensive. Yet it all 'elps. Mother works in a factory, she got 'em the job."

He paused to cough, a truly awful task. The oily perspiration stood on his forehead, his whole frame shook. He had to sit down on the bed before it was half over; in the end he was lying quite prone. The children went on working as if nothing were happening, no tragedy being enacted before their eyes.

But Ursula Rugeley's were blinded with tears. She looked about the room for medicine, wine, anything to alleviate the suffering before her. There was only half a loaf of stale bread on a shelf, beside an empty bottle. She could do nothing but wait. In ten minutes or so the paroxysm had passed; but then the hoarse voice had dulled to a hoarser, more painful whisper.

"I'm all right. It's consumption of the throat, I'm bound to cough."

"But ought you not to be in a hospital? Can't anything be done for you?" she asked, pitifully.

"They don't like cases in a 'orspital as can only end one way. I was in the London 'orspital six weeks, and in Brompton three months. Oh! I've 'ad a lot done for me one way or another. But I'd rather be at 'ome now. There was medicine in that there bottle you was shakin' I'd have had it filled again, if I could ha' got out. The doctor said I could have it as often as I wanted, if I went for it myself. But it's a long step. I've been a sailor, marm, so I'm not afraid of goin' aloft. Don't you cry for me." Ursula was proving herself quite unfit for her work. "Cheer up, my hearty. There's many worse off than me."

She had thought it impossible, but when she got upstairs,

to the other attic, over that of the consumptive sailor's home, she had to admit that Tom Bolding was right.

This was the birthplace of Sally Snape. And as Sally Snape's career was meteoric, as she made history, and the fortunes of several illustrated papers, to say nothing of one or two great complexion specifics, as she was for some time, at least, of considerably more interest to the public than royalty, the favourite for the Derby, or the latest railway murder, it may be well to describe her first home in detail.

The room, as Ursula Rugeley saw it on that May day in 1899, was a sloping roofed attic, about 6 ft. 10 by 8 ft. 4. The plaster had fallen away from the ceiling, and the damp, mouldering rafters were broken and jagged. More than half the room was taken up by an iron bedstead, covered with rags indescribably filthy. From this bed issued those peculiarly loud snores that indicate a drunken sleep. And there were other signs that Sally Snape's father had been indulging in an orgy, signs that must be imagined, not related.

At the window was a wooden table, that and the bed formed almost all the furniture of the room. There was a little more light here than in the downstairs room, but no hint of sun. Through the broken pane came the effluvia of the cesspool, it filled the room like a yellow fog. There were trousers on the table by this window, a steaming flat-iron, and other insignia of tailoring.

Morning, day, and night, for ten years or more, Sally Snape's mother had sat at that dirty window, with its broken panes, through which came occasional sounds of fighting, brawling, cursing, with always that thick effluvia; there she had sat and stitched and stitched and stitched. Mr. Snape was a dock labourer, habitually out of work, but with a thirst that was never idle. And Sally, too, had

always had a good appetite. This patient, weary figure at the window never stopped, never idled, never questioned. She just stitched and stitched. Jim had his beer, and Sally's appetite was fed. Neither of them was consciously grateful, and Jim always knocked her about when he was drunk. He did not mean any harm by it, but he was a big man and chose this form of exercise. Janey Snape always said wearily, when questioned, that "he was a good 'usband to her when he wasn't in the drink." And it must be left at that.

When Ursula Rugeley knocked at the door, and after repeated trials met with no response, she turned the handle gingerly. The cesspool met her, as it were, on the threshold. It turned her sick, faint, dizzy, and there was a mist before her eyes. Then the stillness struck through her, a curious, cold stillness. She found herself shuddering, already frightened.

For once Mrs. Snape was not working. She was seated at the table, surely enough, but her head had fallen forward, and there was a steady drip, drip, on to the floor, as if the rain were coming in. But there was no rain, and the drip was slow, thick, horrible. Jim's boot, a hob-nailed boot, had fallen where it had been flung, but not before it had hit its mark.

The work, still in Janey's hands, was wet too, Ursula saw that. Drip . . . drip . . . drip . . .

The new district visitor stood sick and transfixed for a second, then fled incontinently down the rickety wooden stairs to the street door and the air.

Something she must do, she knew that, and immediately. Police must be summoned, help must be secured. But she was sick and faint. Air must be had first — air, she could not collect her faculties.

But the air was almost as foul in the alley as in the

horrible house. And the organ still ground out its gay discordant tune.

In the gleam of sunshine that lay so strangely on the slime of the roadway, one figure now danced alone. All the other children had stopped to watch Sally. Sally, with her red hair showing rough through her crownless hat, her torn blue school pinafore exhibiting her dirty cotton dress, one foot protruding from the worn elastic of an old kid boot, the other with the toes as bare as the day it came into the world, her hands on her hips, was performing, for the benefit of the organ-grinder and her companions, an improvised version of the cake-walk. From what low music-hall she had derived her inspiration it is impossible to say. But it was obvious that the leering Italian at the organ, and the idle men and women on the doorsteps, found the entertainment attractive. Sally's ugliness, for in those days and in that quarter green eyes and red hair, an upturned nose and a pallid complexion, were not considered beautiful, did not impair their enjoyment. Even then, and in this audience, there was appreciation of Sally's freedom of movement and of her litheness. There was grace in her eccentric gestures. Even the most vulgar movements of that vulgar dance — legs bowed, stomach protruding, head back — were instinct with it.

Ursula, struggling for her self-possession, mechanically watched the dancer. The sun on Sally's rough mop of hair, through her disreputable hat, made a note of red gold in the grey and murk of the roadway. Ursula listened, as if in a dream, to the jeers and comments of the other children; she saw the nodding head, the approving grin, the encouragement of the swarthy Italian organ-grinder.

It was the free use of the Englishman's favourite expletive that roused her.

"It's all b——y fine," Jim Bates said, "but he's follerin' 'er, she ain't follerin' 'im; any one could dance . . ."

"Bloody!"

Yes, that was it; it was blood she had seen! The drip, drip of it was still in her ears, the sickening odour in her nostrils. She had thought she must faint; full consciousness was hardly yet with her.

By some strange process of memory she associated Sally's red head with the scene she had left upstairs. It was due to the alertness of her ocular memory, but she did not realize that. As a matter of fact, the prone head with the hidden gash had the same hair, but one side was matted and dark. . . .

Ursula caught hold of the nearest boy:

"Get a doctor, get a doctor, will you, or the police, quickly; there has been an accident. Help is wanted upstairs, go, go quick," she stammered. She felt her incompetence. She had done nothing; but it was all she could do to keep upright. The horrible incongruity of that dancing figure, and the loud gay grinding of the organ confused her further. She soon had the crowd round her, curious, interested, full of suggestions, baiting her. It was difficult for her to make them share her horror.

"'Oo is it? 'Oo is it?" was the universal question. And when, at last, she gasped out the required information, Jim Bates tumbled head over heels backwards, twice, in the exuberance of his spirits.

"Wot a lark! Sally Snape's mother. Wot a spree! Sal, Sal, yer father's bashed yer mother's 'ead in . . ."

But Sally heard nothing, she was absorbed in her dance, immersed in the organ man's approval, realizing the sympathetic quickness of his grind.

"She won't stop dancing till the tune's off, trust 'er,

miss," Jim said, not without admiration, when he had righted himself from his second somersault. "Sally, 'ere, Sally, do you 'ear?"

But Sally only grinned, with a flash of white teeth. Those teeth that, later, were to smile in London's face from the famous poster, were as perfect in Sally's thirteenth year as they were in her zenith.

"Get along . . ."

She hadn't breath for more, she was pattering now. She knew she ought to have clogs, but she was making as much noise as she was able with her flopping boot. She had no time for Jim Bates' jaw, and the district visitor was naught to her; it wasn't often she got a chance of enjoying 'erself like this. She wasn't goin' to leave off, not 'er! Some bally school-board missus, she supposed. They was always bothering along, and askin' why she was still in the third standard. 'Orrid old creature! Sally was panting, out of breath, but had held out up to the last turn of the organ, when Ursula laid a gentle hand upon her shoulder:

"Is it true you are Sally Snape, my dear?" she asked.

"I'm Sally Snape right enough — I don't know about bein' 'my dear,'" she retorted rudely. "Wot d'yer want?"

She shook off the gentle hand, shrugged up one shoulder in avoidance. She felt that third standard question was going to be raised. Already she was growing sullen and silent in anticipation. The organ-grinder was moving off, her companions were unusually silent, and the flatness of reaction had seized her. She hated the district visitor.

"I've just been up to your room . . ."

Ursula wanted to break it to her gently, to break it to her before Jim Bates came back with doctor and policemen, and the hastily summoned help.

"Yer father's drunk, and yer mother's dyin'," interrupted one of the children, eagerly.

For that was how they broke bad news in Angel Gardens.

Sally turned on her savagely:

"You shut up, Georgie Manders. My father ain't drunker than yours; that's if he's stole enough to get drunk on. . . ."

"Stole, did you say stole?"

In a second the two little girls were facing each other with eyes on fire and cheeks aflame. The first and the second sounding slap came before Ursula could interfere. After that they flew at each other like two grown-up viragoes. Sally had all the best of it, her litheness and agility stood her in good stead here also. Georgie, blinded with blows, quickly delivered, crying, slapping blindly in the air, was already beaten, like all Sally's enemies, when Johnny Doone separated them. He had enjoyed the fun as long as there was any proper fight in it, but when he saw that Georgie was done, and that Sally's eyes were beginning to show red, and vicious, he interfered; but it was not a popular interference.

"Let 'em fight it out. Go on, Sal; go on, Georgie; scratch her b——y eyes out."

Johnny Doone was a big, heavy lout of fourteen; he made no more of thrusting a quieting elbow into one quivering face than he did of seizing the other combatant and shaking her like a kitten. Ursula's speechless horror amused him, but there had been enough of it — "they was only gals; besides, she ought to go 'ome."

"Shet yer 'ead, the two of you. You'll have the beaks here in a minute. Jim Bates has gone for them. Get along 'ome, Sally."

"I shan't, I shan't! I'll 'it 'er! I'll give 'er wot's wot! I'll tear her b——y eyes out! I'll . . ."

Ursula put her hands to her ears.

"Don't yer mind 'er, marm, she'll come right enough, when I've quieted 'er down."

He shook her like a rat. She was as thin and small and lithe as a rat, and she showed as much fight, screaming, belabouring him with her little fists, trying to get her teeth into his hands.

He seemed to enjoy handling her. He could at any time in the struggle have done what he did in the end, namely, taken her by the scruff of the neck, and pushed her before him upstairs, even whilst she was shrieking that she didn't care who was drunk, or wot any one was doing, or wot anybody said; she wouldn't go 'ome, she wouldn't go 'ome, she wouldn't go 'ome!

He used her as a battering ram with which to thrust the door open. Other children and neighbours crowded behind them now, up the wooden stairs, aflame with curiosity.

Johnny and Sally were the first to enter.

Ursula waited behind them in the street, waited for that help which seemed so long in coming.

Sally's shrieks and bad language were quieted all at once. In the room the chillness and stillness seemed to have become more definite. That figure at the table had surely shrunk, the head had fallen more hopelessly forward. It was the breath of death that made the appalling silence. The dirty little room had become a sepulchre.

"Keep 'em out, keep 'em out!" she gasped, her startled lips pale. It was an appeal, and it was unlike Sally to ask for help. The boy's response was to herd out the eager, curious faces with quick fist and foot, to get the door banged and made fast.

"Why didn't you go, too? I can do without you, Johnny Doone," was all the gratitude she showed him.

But it was quite as much as he expected. They moved together over to that prone figure. Unconsciously now their voices were lowered, and they stood close to each other. The boot, the blood, the matted hair, told their own story; it was one with which they were so unhappily familiar.

"'E's done for 'er, sure enough," Johnny whispered.

"Yus."

There was nothing of tenderness, emotion, filial piety, in the way she spoke; there was a horrible callousness, although the colour had gone out of her cheeks, and her appeal to Johnny to keep the neighbours out had a sobbing passion in it.

"The perlice'll soon be here. I allus knew it would 'appen. And them trousers was to go home to-night. He might have let her finish them trousers." There was really a sob in her voice. "It 'ould have been four-and-six in his pocket. Wake up, father, wake up!"

She rushed to the bed, seized and shook him passionately, without avail.

Johnny handed her a cracked jug that stood on a rickety chair.

"'Ere, try this."

Fortunately it was full. She stood on tiptoe, balancing it, then dashed the contents quickly on to his face.

"That'll wake 'im," she said viciously. There was something elfish, uncanny, about her. The short-lived awe and terror of death had left her. Now the situation became one that held a promise of excitement, variety. And she was glad to have Johnny there. She never knew whether she liked Jim Bates or Johnny Doone best. Perhaps it pleased her most when both of them were fighting with, or for, her. But Jim had gone for police and doctor. And her struggle with Johnny on the stairs gave zest to their relation.

Mr. Snape resented the cold water, he roused himself, and began to grumble and swear. Even then he would have turned over again to his drunken sleep. But neither Johnny nor Sally would have it. Johnny had secured the room against invaders, and now felt at home in it. He too was beginning to appreciate the possibilities of the situation. It wouldn't do to let Sally's father go on sleeping. They must hear his account before the police came.

"'Ere, wake up, wake up."

"Why should I? . . . 'Oo the 'ell are you? Get out."

"Ye've murdered yer wife, and the perlice is coming."

Mr. Snape was finally compelled to a sitting position; then he stared about him helplessly. Next, he fell into a reasonless rage, and asked —

"Wot d'you two b—y brats mean by staring at me?"

"You look wot ye've done," said Sally solemnly, standing aside to let him see. Johnny couldn't help grinning at Jim Snape's face, it grew so ashen. He fell shaking and trembling:

"Wot are yer gettin' at? Jane, Jane, you sit up. I'm a comin' over to you; you get along with your work."

But the dead woman never stirred.

"Wot's took 'er?" he said to Johnny, feebly; then, with conviction: "She's lazyin', that's wot she's doin', lazyin'. Jane!"

He could not get up, could not face it; he was shaking all over, and frightened, horribly frightened, not quite sober. Suddenly he lurched upright; the knocking at the door had reached his dulled ears.

"'Oo's bringin' the perlice over me?" he yelled, and made a lounging, uncertain blow at the silent Sally. She dodged it, she was practised in the art, but Johnny had quickly put out an ingenious leg, and Mr. Snape fell over it, heavily.

"'E wouldn't have 'urt me," she said to the boy contemptuously, "he daresn't. I'd larn 'im. She never knew how to manage 'im, mother didn't."

Johnny opened the door to the police and doctor. He stayed, too, an interested onlooker, whilst all the sordid tragedy was being investigated. He tried to make Sally talk to him, but Sally had grown sullen again.

"You wouldn't say nothin', not if he was bein' 'ung," he said, resentfully, under his breath.

"Nor I wouldn't if you was," she retorted quickly. But on this occasion, at least, it seemed she was not to be put to the test.

Mr. Snape was put upon a stretcher and conveyed with due dignity to the station, accompanied by a small cortège of idlers. But a very brief examination had proved that the well-aimed boot, though it might have accelerated, was not the cause of Janey Snape's decease. She had worked and starved that Sally should have food, and mechanically, perhaps, to avoid the blows and physical abuse which represented Jim's way of urging her to industry. And all at once the machinery had stopped. The doctor called it "*angina*," briefly.

"Angelina," whispered Johnny. "'Oo's Angelina?" But again Sally's silence baffled him. What was the good of trying to keep her spirits up if she wouldn't respond?

"Ain't you goin' to say nothing?" he persisted.

"I wish she'd ha' finished them trousers."

Sally did not mean to be callous, and she knew Johnny meant well by his endeavours. She had been watching all the scene, but when they took the trousers from the dead hands whose grasp seemed so difficult to unloosen, she could only express regret that they were unfinished. The observation broke from her involuntarily, it was

Janey Snape's requiem. From the first Sally showed a practical mind.

It was Sally's practical mind that confounded the sentimental district visitor. She had waited in Mrs. Evans' room during the weary time that elapsed between the coming of the police and the departure of Mr. Snape on his dignified stretcher. Within another hour, she was told, the bearers from the mortuary would be here. It was then she took her courage in both hands, and went across the landing.

Sally could not be left alone in that awful room. Every one did something for his or her fellow-creatures in this ugly world into which Ursula Rugeley had awkwardly stumbled. She must do something, too, for Sally. Of course, Sally's magnetism had struck her. She thought it was universal philanthropy. But it was not, it was just — Sally Snape. The doctor told her Sally had watched all the proceedings, that it was obvious no detail escaped the bright eyes of the little red-haired girl, who had nevertheless an animal aloofness about her, and had resented alike sympathy and questionings.

"She has bin a good mother to you, Sal," the policeman urged. He knew the pair of them. Jim Snape had been locked up before this. "There ain't another kid in this place that wouldn't be cryin' their eyes out if they lost 'arf as good a mother as you've 'ad."

Sally put her tongue out at him quickly; she would have liked to spit at him.

"You shan't see me cry; nobody shan't see me cry. I'll tear me teeth out rather," she was saying to herself. "If I didn't feel so queer inside, I'd larf, just to show 'em. I wish they'd take that blood away. I wish they'd turn her face the other side. Wot a crack he must have fetched her!"

But when Ursula had taken her courage by the two hands, and forced it and herself into the room, Sally had come out of her corner. Mrs. Snape was on the bed, with a sheet drawn over her face, her figure was but vaguely defined beneath it; the cold had not gone out of the room.

Ursula came in breathlessly, with the phrase she had composed, glib on her lips:

"You can't stay here alone. . . ."

But again she paused on the threshold. It was Sally now who sat at the table. Johnny lounged against it, watching her.

"Why shouldn't *I* finish them?" she was saying. "I can do it as well as 'er. And the rent's due; she'd like me to get that four-and-six. You'll be able to take 'em home for me, if you stay till I've finished. Wot's that?" She had heard Ursula's hesitating phrase. "Can't stay 'ere alone. Why not? And I ain't alone. . . ."

Johnny had a quicker appreciation of Ursula's well-meant effort than Sally. But then Sally had only just found her match and candle, and was beginning to sew. It was long before she had the power to project herself into another person's mind. Her egotism left no room for the consideration of other people's personalities or intentions. It was Johnny who saw how well-meaning Miss Rugeley was, and that she was sorry for Sally.

"She'll be all right, marm," he said reassuringly. "They're fetching away the corpse this evenin', and Sally'll have the bed to 'erself. Don't you worrit about Sal."

"I don't want no one to worrit about me," said Sal, biting her thread, settling down to her work. "I can get along all right. You go back to the school board, or any one who sent you along, and say Sally Snape's all right, she can take care of herself. 'Ere, Johnny, you light up that

there iron. There's a penny on the mantelshelf, you can put it in for the gas."

"But I can't reconcile it with my conscience . . ." Ursula began, feebly.

Ursula Rugeley, who had rejected love and marriage, and turned her back on her relations, fighting through her adult years for some strange phantom of lately secured independence, failed, of course, to realize that here was her more robust prototype. She suggested that one of Mrs. Crowe's children would be a better protector for Sally than Johnny Doone. She even offered, this was a very half-hearted proposal, to take her home for the night to that Bayswater villa where she herself dwelt on good terms with respectability. She meant well, she had as good a heart as is compatible with a limited intelligence. But she could hardly be made to understand that her presence was regarded as an intrusion, and that Johnny's tact and Sally's indifference covered the same resentment.

Ursula Rugeley had undertaken work of which she was incapable. She knew it when she reached her villa that night, leaving Sally Snape stitching at the trousers by the light of the one candle, the pennyworth of gas saved for the flatiron, and Johnny keeping his strange vigil beside her.

CHAPTER II

SALLY, with the connivance of her indulgent father, spent the next three years in not wholly unsuccessful attempts to evade the school board. She was industrious enough at the tailoring, for there she saw the tangible result of her labours. Eight hours' continuous and unremitting stitching meant something like one shilling and fivepence. One shilling and fivepence provided her with food for three days. But a whole week's regular school attendance meant twopence out of pocket, and nothing gained, at least nothing upon which Sally set a value. So she feigned illness, invented infection, changed her address, and, in fact, resorted to all the subterfuges our beneficent educational laws rendered necessary. The deterioration of personal character, which is the usual penalty of continual lying, left her unaffected. For, truly, at this period of her career she cannot justly be said to have possessed a character. She had only a belly; and the problem of how to fill it absorbed her entire intellectuality. All the machinery for thinking with which nature had endowed her worked at this. That, nevertheless, on her sixteenth birthday she could read fairly well, write exceedingly badly, and spell not at all, proves that we do not spend our ten millions a year quite without result. To provide Sally Snape, individually, with her acquirements had cost the country about £87 16s. 11d. That was how the items worked out. The pursuit of Sally and her father had needed almost the entire service of a

capable officer for a little over four years. Jim Snape had been fined for her non-attendance, had failed to pay the fine, and been imprisoned. In prison the State fed and clothed and guarded him, very uncomfortably, and again at an extraordinary expense. He caught a severe cold in the deadly cleanliness of his official surroundings, the cold attacked his lungs, and he broke a blood-vessel. So he was taken to the prison infirmary, doctored and given luxuries, pampered to such an extent that he could not stand Sally's housekeeping when he was released. Fortunately a foggy day's work at the Limehouse Docks, when he emerged from his enforced retirement, finished what the State had so well begun.

He lingered for some months in the infirmary of the local workhouse, grumbling much at his entertainment, and appearing to regret the jail.

Sally was finally freed from both her father and the school board when she was in her sixteenth year.

She then tried "living in" at the house of a Russian Jew, who ran an uninspected factory in a cellar. The top part of the house was let—four families in a room—to other Russian Jews. But Sally's red head or quick tongue, her slim figure or slick fingers, attracted Mr. Kirstenblum's shifty eyes, and at the end of a month he raised her wages from five to six shillings a week. That Sally accepted gladly, but when he tried to kiss her in the passage she promptly, perhaps vulgarly, smacked his face. She had not yet learned society manners.

Ighmy Kirstenblum, however, would no doubt have taken the blow as befitted the traditions of his race, he would have turned the other cheek also. But Providence, masquerading in the unwieldy guise of Mrs. Kirstenblum, intervened. There followed an homeric scene, of which the upshot was the immediate dismissal of Sally Snape in

a state of furious indignation, but with only a limited knowledge of the accusation which was being brought against her. Mrs. Kirstenblum's Yiddish was voluble, but difficult to follow. Sally was never a linguist.

Trade was slack, and the weather inclement. Mrs. Kirstenblum was not only voluble, but vindictive. There is a certain standard of moral conduct among the alien population that has cornered the Limehouse tailoring trade, and, although Sally Snape had never fallen below it, the coarse-mouthed wife of her late employer gave her a bad character. No one would have her as an inmate of the house, and piecework was difficult to get.

Sally had never known anything but privation. Now the grim and ghastly figure of starvation pursued her, dogged her footsteps, caught at her skirts, was never out of sight. It is now the fashion to call Sally beautiful. But late one night in November, 1902, when Johnny Doone met her once more in Angel Gardens, it was only the *Pursuer* that one saw in her. She had grown extraordinarily thin, her face was shrunk to a grey shadow, and her indeterminate eyes gave no relief to it. The thick tousled red mop of matted hair was covered by a shawl, her teeth had forgotten to smile, they knew only how to chatter.

"Hullo," said Johnny; "ain't that you, Sal Snape?"

"It's me, sure enough, wot's left of me."

There was a sob in her voice; she had had a rough time, and her spirit was almost broken. She had not forgotten Johnny Doone, although since Jim Snape's imprisonment she had had no rendezvous with her old friends.

He was lounging against a door post, the recognized Angel Gardens attitude. He had been a big lout of fourteen; at seventeen he had not grown except in loutishness. Johnny had been to sea. For the last two or three years Grimsby had been his headquarters. But casual labour

suited him better than regular employment. He had been back at the docks some months now.

"You recollect that night we sat up together? I've often thought of that night."

"Oh, yes," she said indifferently.

"Are yer still at the tailoring?"

"Seems there ain't no tailoring."

"Trade slack?"

"'Ere, leave off arsking questions. D'yer know if Mrs. Evans is still 'ere?"

"Her as used to do knittin', and talk tracts?"

"That's 'er."

"What do yer want 'er for?"

"Well, if yer must know, I'm dead out. She'd give me a bite and a lie down, p'raps. The luck's bin against me."

Johnny eyed her; he saw she was in trouble, but he knew her so well. And he wanted to help her. If he said the wrong word, she would fly at him as of old, in trouble or out of it. And the right one was difficult to find.

"You mind that night?" he said again, sympathetically.

"Yes," she answered wearily.

Now she sat down on the step. The street was dim before her eyes, the mud and puddles had strange playing lights, her head seemed to have grown so large and heavy that her limbs could not carry it; that was why she sat down. So it was Johnny Doone talking to her. Well! let him talk. This was almost "home"; she had come back here with some vague idea that Mrs. Evans would help her. She could take help from Mrs. Evans, other people had offered it to her, but she had had no help.

He went on awkwardly:

"I've took on your old room, Sandy Kirk 'alves it with me. You recollect Sandy Kirk, 'im as 'ad his leg

tore off on the railway. 'E's net-making now; ye'll see him at the window if you come upstairs. Yer'll come upstairs, Sal?"

His voice was almost pleading. He had carried her up those stairs before, forced her up them.

He had half a mind to do it again. But perhaps she'd come of her own accord:

"Sal!"

She was sitting on the doorstep, her heavy head had fallen forward on her thin arms, she hardly heard him, that head of hers was so light and swimming. She had eaten nothing since yesterday morning; and all the time she had been on the tramp, asking for work, getting none.

"You mind I carried yer up 'em that night?"

No answer.

"I'd 'arf a mind to do it again?"

"'Ave you?" she said indifferently.

She had come to the end of her tether; for the moment there was no fight left in her. He waited, not even yet quite sure that she was not feinting, that she would not turn and spring on him, that the old Sal was not lying in wait for him. He lounged a step nearer her:

"You're dead beat, that's wot's the matter with you?"

No answer.

"Sandy and me wos just goin' to have supper . . ."

She looked up at him.

"Supper!" Her eyes were strained. All at once her pride broke.

"Johnny . . . I'm nigh starving," she whispered; her small face was eloquent of it, and so were her gaunt eyes.

"Come along up," he said roughly; he was more moved than he had words for. He had to put his arm round her; she was almost incapable of further effort. Again he half-

led, half-pushed her up those rickety stairs. How familiar it all was.

"I'm 'eavy on you," she said apologetically.

"I could take yer up in one 'and." His voice and manner were rough, but his heart was very tender over her. He thought now he wanted his old spitfire Sal back again.

The room was very different from what it had been in Janey Snape's time. To commence with, the big bed was gone and the wooden table, and that made it look larger. Then the roof had been mended. Sandy Kirk had a passion for cleanliness; he had been nearly a year in hospital, and they'd "learnt" it him there, he often said. He liked warmth, and there was a cheerful fire in the grate, and an overwhelming smell of cooking. Sandy was busy about it; his crutch was under one arm, but with the other he was manipulating the saucepan. He did not look up as Johnny entered with his visitor:

"'Arf a mo'," he said cheerfully. "I'm just turning of it out. Hullo!" For then he looked up.

"It's Sal Snape," Johnny explained.

"Sal!"

"I'm starving, Sandy."

Her pride was all broken up. The smell from the saucepan dissipated the last remains of it. She burst into tears, and her sobs wrung the hearts of the two friends; their awkward sympathy, and their memories of her, hindered them in their haste to help her.

But after they had shared their meal, and Sal had recovered herself somewhat, they all three sat talking, gathering together their reminiscences of each other.

Johnny said he was back at the docks, earning his eighteen shillings a week. Sandy made fishing-nets; his accident had been fortunate for him, he had had compensa-

tion, and now work had been found for him. He was immediately under the supervision of the local clergy.

"I'm better off with one leg nor ever I was with two," he explained.

Only Sally had had bad luck.

"Stay along of us a bit, Sal, there's more 'an enough," Sandy urged. Sandy was only fifteen, and although he was prescient and alive to the difficulties of living, and the hardships of the maimed, he was ignorant of decorum. He even implored her:

"You can 'elp with the cooking, and work will come erlong. It's jolly up here, with nuffin, nor nobody, to interfere."

Sally had told baldly of her struggles, of her vain search for work, of snubs and rebuffs, of hard times and slack trade. But she had left out the Kirstenblum incident. It was not the only one of the kind either. It seemed to her that men always wanted to kiss or maul her. She had an instinctive fierceness of virginity, a crude, ill-defined hatred of being touched or, as she put it herself, mauled about. All men were antipathetic to her. But Johnny and Sandy were boys, old pals too. She had fought with Johnny, and even with Sandy before he lost his leg.

"I'll stay a bit," she said, at length, and not without hesitation, "if I won't be in no one's way. I'll pay my share though," she added quickly, nearer to her old manner. Perhaps she saw a shadow of change in Johnny's expression. "If I'm welcome to both of yer."

None of the people Sally had known were living now in Angel Gardens. Jim Bolding was dead, and both the little girls. Mrs. Crowe was dead, and Mrs. Evans had been justified in her faith. For she too was dead. Only last winter there had been an outbreak of fever, and many, deemed undesirables here, had gone to find their welcome

in a many-roomed mansion. There was no shorter catechist among the ragged remnant of the submerged tenth that lingered here, to question the propriety of that strange *ménage*.

Sally stayed with the two boys for barely a month, but even that month of decent food and congenial companionship restored her strength and courage. Her physical health was always perfect. Johnny and Sandy shared the bed; but the luck had turned the very day Sally went home — she called it "home" for many years, and thought of it that way. The luck turned, and she got work — a dozen pairs of trousers from the firm that formerly employed her mother. That was Johnny's idea, she had had to give them up in that school-board-dodging time. But they recognized her when she called upon them; they knew she was to be trusted, and gladly gave her the work. She slept on those trousers, under her table by the window; they made a nice soft bed, and some of them were piled over her for warmth.

The strange *ménage* lasted a month. It might have gone on longer if the order for the destruction of Angel Gardens had not at last been enforced, and the men from the Metropolitan Board of Works arrived to execute it. Of course, notice after notice had been served upon the inhabitants, but few of them could read, and none of them could project their minds into the future. So the men, and their picks, came like a shock, even to Sally and her roommates. Johnny was at the docks; Sandy and Sally had made no plans, they had nowhere to go. They looked on dumbly, half-stupefied, whilst their household goods were bundled into the street.

There, in the street, and around them, were hunger, disease, and despair. Like rats from their holes came the people, red-eyed, resentful of the authority that was taking

from them their cesspool of a home, miserables all, too weak to fight. Except for that, the scene in the street was like an Irish eviction. The women made their moan, wept quietly or fiercely, and the men stood about and cursed feebly.

It was the representative of the Charity Organization Society, whom Sally had once mistaken for a school-board inspector, that came to them when they stood bewildered among their poor belongings. There were a few capable men and women, from the parish and elsewhere, who had realized that help would be needed, and had come to give it. Ursula Rugeley had learnt her work better by now, she no longer offered help without sympathy.

She approached them, because she was here to help, and they seemed most helpable, young, and more bewildered than resentful.

"It is rather dreadful, isn't it," she said kindly, "this sudden order for removal? I suppose you have a father or mother, or somebody belonging to you who has gone to find rooms?"

Sally looked younger than her sixteen years. Sandy had never grown since his leg was taken off. They seemed two mere children. His hospital experience had taught Sandy manners, and the ways of gentlefolk, and he answered when he was directly addressed:

"We didn't know we'd have to go so soon. There's only me and Sally, and Johnny wot's at the docks. We'll 'ave to let Johnny know somehow."

"Your brother?"

"No, marm. We are none of us no relation, but we lives together. We'll 'ave to find another room."

"I'll have to finish them trousers quick," said Sally.

Ursula looked at her with sudden interest.

"You are Sally Snape," she said quickly. "I remember

you so well. You must let me help you with your moving, and to find you a room. Have you tried at the new Peabody Buildings?"

"We ain't goin' to live in a workhus'," said Sally ungratefully. She had no special memory of Ursula; "all they school-board people look alike." She had never corrected this impression.

"It ain't a workhus', Sal. It's all right," Sandy explained.

Ursula Rugeley took the entire responsibility of them and their household. Sandy, owing to his accident and his compensation, was more or less of a public character. The clergyman of the parish was very glad to see he had found a friend.

"You can leave these two to me," Ursula said decisively; and the Reverend Mr. Jay, who had his hands very full indeed, was glad to do so.

Ursula found them two rooms for seven-and-six a week, and, before she left, had made these habitable. Sally attracted Miss Rugeley to-day as she had three years ago. The girl's simplicity and directness appealed to her. She was working at the trousers before she had been an hour in her new quarters. Sandy would have to hobble down to the docks to meet Johnny, she said decisively. If the lady would like to wait until she had finished, she could talk, but she couldn't stop working, "not for nobody," she said. "I've promised to take them trousers 'ome to-night, and 'ome I mean to take 'em."

And Ursula, indefinably attracted, stayed and watched. She avoided the difficult subject of standards, and asked no question that could wound Sally's sensitiveness. Sally's sensitiveness was curious in its lapses and limitations. What she found intolerable now, or at any time, was any allusion to her shortcomings. She bore praise well.

Ursula praised her industry, and noted that Sandy seemed devoted to her. Sally grew quite talkative under this sort of treatment, although conversation was never her strong point. And Ursula was soon in possession of many details of tailoring, and the ways of the trade. She also learnt incidentally that every year, "owin' to them Russian Jews," work was harder to get, and worse paid for when obtained. It transpired incidentally that, if Sally worked fourteen hours a day, it was as much as she could do to earn her twelve shillings a week, and she had to buy her thread out of that! But it wasn't regular, that was the only thing of which Sally complained, you couldn't always rely upon getting more when you took 'ome your work. She weren't goin' to live on Sandy and Johnny, she'd a mind to look for something else.

Ursula visited her protégés in Peabody's Buildings with unusual regularity. She grew quite intimate with them, in fact. The size and age of Johnny Doone rather startled her when she first realized him, and the nature of his attitude towards Sally. She had spasms and qualms of conscience. She no more understood the sex question, as it appeared to the decent denizens of Limehouse, than Sally understood, later on, how the problem presented itself in Mayfair. What is in the West End an agreeable society custom has an ugly word attached to it in the slums. Sally was quite definitely, and not ignorantly, virtuous. And she was protected by her temperament. There was quick work with Johnny one evening when he attempted a rough endearment, he had the contents of a saucepan in his face in the twinkling of an eye.

"Don't you be comin' that game with me, Johnny Doone," Sally said significantly. "I ain't that sort."

"I wasn't comin' no game," he answered sullenly. "I suppose you and me'll get married one day."

He had no prophetic instinct at all. "There's no 'arm in kissin'."

"No, nor no good neither, that I can see," she answered quickly. "An' as for marryin', I 'ate the very name of it."

Ursula could have spared herself much anxiety if she had realized Sally better, but Sally was never easy to understand. She was extraordinarily imitative. Before Ursula had paid her half a dozen visits, Sally had picked up something of her talk and accent. She even went to the extreme length of tidying her hair and washing her face when she expected her visitor. But that was one day when the last bundle of clothes had been finished, and there was no new work on hand. She and Ursula discussed the matter very seriously, and, although the suggestion of getting work in a factory came in the first place from Sally, it was Miss Rugeley who made it possible, and even easy.

Sally thought herself in clover when, with her friend's influence to back her, she was taken on by Messrs. Hall & Palmer, in the celebrated jam and pickle warehouse. Fourteen shillings a week was her wage, and it seemed a liberal one. Only ten hours' work was expected of her, and time from that was allowed for dinner in the middle of the day, and tea in the afternoon. Sally had not been used to such luxury as became hers immediately she was taken on by that liberal and intelligent firm. There were nearly six hundred girls employed in one department or another—jam-making, pickle-making, preserving ginger, cooking hams, cutting and drying vegetables for soups, preparing palatable delicacies of every kind and variety. The cleanliness demanded was a tax upon Sally Snape's temper during the first few days. She had to wear a white pinafore, and to wash her hands; but she fell into line quickly. Her income was easy to live upon; a sixpenny dinner was to be had at the Girls' Club, and tea for twopence.

From the beginning it had been Ursula's desire that Sally should leave the boys to themselves. And presently Sally was persuaded of the folly of living in Limehouse when she worked near Shaftesbury Avenue. Mary Murray and she picked fruit together at the same tub. Sally had always her personal magnetism, and a capacity for making friends easily and quickly. Mary and she had exchanged histories before Sally had been a week in the provision factory. Within a fortnight the two girls were living together, sharing a furnished room, at six shillings a week, in Greek Street, Soho, having practically a common purse, and a community of goods and interests.

Mary was nineteen, nearly two years older than Sally Snape, a fair-haired, anæmic girl. She wore an imitation turquoise comb in her hair, the fringe of which was kept in curling pins for five days in the week. It was desperately straight, and rather scanty, and this was the tragedy of Mary's life. Her thin, bloodless lips drooped pathetically, and her blue eyes were plaintive. But the pathos and the plaintiveness were all about her hair. Sally's exuberant red mass exasperated her, and her inability to persuade Sally to curling pins or papers was a perpetual grievance. Otherwise the girls were close friends.

Mary Murray belonged to a considerably higher social class than Sally Snape. Her father had been the proud possessor of a hair-dressing and tobacco shop in Bermondsey. The sale of tobacco he managed himself, but he had an assistant for the shaving. This assistant had to clean the windows as well as shave the customers, and one day he fell off the exceedingly rickety ladder, with which he had been provided, and broke his thigh. He brought an action against his employer. Under one of the many iniquitous Acts framed in the interests of labour and against capital, he won his case, and ruined Mary's father, who,

having neither assets nor courage, evaded payment by hanging himself in the backyard. All of which information Mary gave freely, adding, with all the vindictiveness of which her feebleness was capable, that Jim Mortimer never got a penny of his money, for when everything was sold there was only enough for the lawyers!

Mary Murray's parents had encouraged an ambition for higher things than they ever achieved. They were of the smallest tradespeople. But in the dim, yet golden, background of their lives there loomed always the possibility of a piano. In their particular social stratum the piano was the outward sign of prosperity. They never actually attained it; but, by living with it as a goal before her eyes, Mary had been early fired with a desire for self-improvement. If she envied Sally her hair, she was soon able to show herself more than Sally's equal. She wrote the day's menu on her slate at the instance of the forewoman, and volunteered to help with the accounts when a day-in-the-country fund was started in the workroom.

Sally would not own her incompetence; it was never Sally's way to admit that she was ignorant. But she did begin about this time to regret her success in evading education, and with infinite tact Miss Rugeley was able to induce her to a Continuation School for a year.

That year at Hall & Palmer's saw Sally Snape grown from a miserable little gutter-snipe into the five feet four which she was afterwards assured was the ideal height for the boards of the Verandah Theatre. She talked genteelly, like Mary Murray, had a comb with even bigger turquoises, and a Sunday hat with two white feathers in it. Incidentally, too, she had become aware that Luke Cullen, who was in the machinists' department, earning good money and sober nearly all the week, was throwing himself in her

way whenever opportunity offered, and at other times. The girls chaffed her about him:

"You can have him for the asking," Mary Murray said enviously. "You wait till the day we go to Epping, and see if he don't want you to fix up something. He'll be wanting you to go to Hampstead with him on Bank Holiday, I shouldn't be surprised."

"He may want," said Sally with a toss of her red head.

"You won't go?" Mary queried. Mary was not anxious to be married, but would desperately have liked to be wooed. Her anæmia made her romantic, and although her imagination pictured something superior to the oil-stained, stunted, occasionally tipsy Luke Cullen, still, he was better than no lover at all.

But Sally was neither romantic nor imaginative. The hat and the comb meant nothing more than the steady development of her imitative faculty. Neither Luke Cullen's high wages, he was popularly supposed to draw two pounds a week, nor his position, appealed to her. She liked Johnny Doone better, although he was only a dock labourer, and she knew to what that led! But she did not want either of them nearer to her than she could help. She told Luke so when he sidled up to her in the omnibus on the eventful Epping Forest day, and began, as she averred, to make himself unpleasant.

"I wish you would keep yourself more to yourself, Mr. Cullen," she said.

"You need not be so stand-offish, on a 'oliday, Miss Snape," he pleaded.

"You are crushing my dress." She was slightly mollified, very genteel, however, and not prepared to yield an inch. That was at the beginning of the day. Later on, the unwonted luxury of the drive, the sweet spring air, the singing of the birds, the green in Epping Forest,

moved her, and she became more companionable. She still did not want Luke near her, but she exchanged chaff, she let him "foller her about" and sit next to her on the grass, whilst they ate the food they had brought with them. She even accepted a drink of stout, from his tumbler. After that their intimacy progressed apace.

Sally, now that she had filled out a little, and had imbibed some of Mary Murray's notions of gentility, stood out amongst all those rough-and-ready factory girls with a certain individuality. The secret of it is hard to define, but it followed her through all her vicissitudes. Wherever Sally Snape was to be found — in a van full of factory girls, in the show-room at Brook Street, or in the great picture gallery, full of guests, at Buckminster — she made her particular effect. She was never quite one with the crowd, she always stood alone.

Mr. Peastone, who, in his own estimation, was quite an important man in the counting-house of Messrs. Hall & Palmer's, had come to this "beano," as he called it, for a spree. The one shilling that was the inclusive price of the whole entertainment was of no account to him. He and a pal had hired a dogcart for the day, and he had driven it himself. In truth his driving was a strange affair; but the dogcart came from the same stables as the omnibuses, and the spavined, broken-kneed, three-legged animal followed the last omnibus quietly enough. Charlie Peastone thought himself a very great swell indeed as he drove his dogcart. And to Alf Stevens, too, who was halving expenses with him, he seemed a very dashing chap. Alf was also in the counting-house, but he had not Charlie Peastone's initiative. He would never have thought of hiring a dogcart, for instance.

That feeling of its being "no end of a spree" lasted all through the drive to Epping; but it got a little flat

under the trees, when every one was enjoying the picnic in parties of two and three, and Charlie and Alf, having forgotten to provide themselves with what they called provender, had been compelled to seek a neighbouring public-house for cold beef and pickles. But the beef and pickles were good, and Charlie knew what was what. He drank whisky-and-soda, although he would have infinitely preferred beer, and he bought two twopenny cigars, of a fine British brand. Then they strolled back to the others.

"Let's have a squint at the girls. We might pick up something," he said airily. "Did you see that red-headed little lot in the first bus? I just got a look at her before they started."

"There was a pretty girl with her, fair, genteel-looking."

"So you spotted them too, good for you. Come along, we'll give them a treat."

Sally was in the humour for being given a treat, for Luke Cullen was not an exhilarating companion. In the machine shop he knew his job; out of it he knew nothing, except that this was "an 'oliday," and he thought it was time he got married. He had made his effort at wooing Sally for the last few weeks. That is, he had made up his mind, and had no doubt of hers. Two pounds a week was good money. The chaff of the girls had consolidated his position. That she had shared his meal and his stout made the engagement as definite to him as an announcement in the "Morning Post." He liked to have Sal Snape sitting by him under the trees in the sun; he had nothing to say, so he abstained from conversation. Sal would know "they was enjoyin' themselves." The beer, the jolting of the omnibus in the open air, the unwonted leisure, made him feel drowsy. So he drowsed. And Sally, as she sat beside him, thought she would just as soon be cutting up gherkins.

Mr. Peastone, arm-in-arm with Alf, took off his hat with a flourish.

"Mr. Cullen, I believe?" he said to Luke.

Luke admitted his identity by nodding his head.

"I thought you would not object if me and my friend joined your party. Perhaps your good lady, however, prefers a *tête-à-tête*."

Tête-à-tête was a fine touch. Alf's admiration grew momentarily.

"You're welcome, sirs," said Luke. He recognized the superiority of the black coat; it was Mr. Peastone, too, who paid him his wages. The clerk occupied the same part of the great premises as the principals, and something of their sanctity rested upon his narrow shoulders.

"I saw you in the dogcart," said Sally simply. She had admired his dashing air, his red satin tie, his rakish hat; to her, too, he was quite a swell.

"Well, now, that makes me feel proud. So you noticed me? We came along at a good rate, didn't we? I may introjuce my friend, Mr. Alfred Stevens?"

"Pleased to meet you, sir," said Luke. He found them "affable gents."

Charlie Peastone was always considered good company; he sat down on the grass and proceeded to prove his quality.

"You've had your dinner, I see."

It was not difficult to see, for the débris was in the paper at their feet, and two beer bottles were stuck in the fork of the tree under which they were sitting. "We had ours at a restaurong." ("Good for you again," thought Alf, "I should have called it a pub.")

"That's what I say, if you're on a spree, go the whole hog—I don't mean bacon! My friend here, he's such a wag, I've got to hurry or he'd have been out with that joke

before me. But we can't be happy without the ladies. Who was that friend of yours, a pretty girl with a blue feather? I know a prettier one though!"

He expected that to have an effect, but it missed fire, because, till now, Sally had not realized that her person was attractive.

"She and me are great chums; it's Mary Murray, you mean, she's got a green blouse on."

"That's her," put in Alf eagerly.

Charlie winked at him, and then at Sally, who liked being taken into his confidence that way.

"He knows, you see. Now I wager he can tell you to a shoestring what she'd got on, and where she got it. As for me, I don't care what a girl's got outside; it's what she keeps inside that matters. I'd rather have a pretty girl in an ugly hat than an ugly girl in a pretty hat. What do you say, miss?"

"I don't know."

"Well, put it the other way. Do you care what a fellow has got on?"

She had not cared, but now she looked at Charlie, and from Charlie's broadcloth to Luke's fustian, and she thought she did care. Charlie caught her contrasting glance, and her eye. Then he laughed, and she with him. What a set of grinders the girl had, so small and even! The dimple in her cheek came out when she smiled, and her green eyes sparkled.

"Well, we won't press the point," he said politely. But he need not have been careful of Luke's feelings, for Luke had missed the glances and the by-play; he was growing sleepier. He liked hearing them talk, it had a holiday air about it. He settled himself comfortably against the tree, and presently, in the midst of the fun, fell asleep.

For, of course, they had fun. Mary, seeing Sally so well occupied, with two gentlemen, as well as Luke Cullen, came over, full of curiosity to see what was going on. She too, it appeared, had noticed the dogcart. She and Alf fell in love with each other almost at first sight. Whilst Charlie was "making things go," cracking jokes, telling anecdotes, paying compliments, getting more smiles and dimples and admiration from Sally, Alf and Mary were eyeing each other timorously, venturing on sentences that never had an end, finding mutual shyness; quite in agreement about the weather, sympathetic over trifles. Of course it was Charlie who made the first move, but Alf and Mary rose very willingly to join in a walk. Luke, by this time, had completely surrendered himself to slumber. The party arranged itself naturally in pairs.

Sally had never met any one so brilliant as Charlie Peastone. He had graduated at bars and buffets, where his fluent *persiflage* met with quick response. Sally knew nothing of the give and take of social intercourse. He had to do all the talking. But perhaps he enjoyed his walk the more on that account, and of course, he felt the admiration he was exciting. Sally thought he was a gentleman; she was exhilarated by her rise in the social sphere. She caught envious glances from the other girls. Mary Murray and she were the cynosure of all eyes. She wished now that she had taken more pains with her dress; she wished she were as genteel as Mary. She felt that dissatisfaction with herself which is the first change on the horizon, preceding the dawn of love. She thought about herself all the time. Perhaps, if Charlie's exuberant fluency had had ebb and flow he might have found her dull, as she had found Luke Cullen. But there was no ebb to Charlie's speech.

The red hair, the green eyes, the lithe figure under the

cheap blouse, caught him and held him. He did not forget that she was a factory girl and he a clerk, but he was very much attracted. He had to admit to Alf that he was very much attracted, because he wanted Alf to do him a favour.

"I'll do as much for you one day, old man. One good turn deserves another, and you've got the first chance. It'll be a treat for her, sort of landmark, don't you know, quite out of the common. I want you to let me drive her back to town; evening, don't you know, and stars, dash of sentiment, you twig the sort of thing, 'on such a night as this'; it's no end of a spree. I haven't mentioned it to her yet, but you won't play dog-in-the-manger," Charlie urged.

Alf was never selfish, and, in truth, not averse to the proposition. He guessed at Charlie's driving powers pretty well. They had come along all right, but now it was dusk. He could be very safe and comfortable in the omnibus. He would have Sally's place, next to Mary. She was a very nice girl, she seemed to understand him, and already he knew that her people were gentlefolk, that she had seen better days. It is possible that the piano had been actual, and not potential, in Mary's narrative.

He demurred a little, nevertheless, in order to make his acquiescence more valued.

"A nice idea, bringing me here, and leaving me to get home as best I may. And I suppose I'm to pay my half-share all the same?"

"Oh, no! If that's all, I don't mind settling two-thirds to your one. And you'll get home all right, almost as quick as we shall." He was really anxious about it; he urged the many advantages of the arrangement.

"And how about that fellow she was having dinner with?" Alf asked.

"Oh, he's very fuddled; he's had beer with his dinner,

and beer with his tea, and a drop of it between whiles. I've been over to look at him; he's still asleep under the tree. When the time comes some one will haul him into a seat, and he won't miss Sally. He is nothing to her, she told me so herself."

"All right. But, mind, I shan't pay more than one-third. Don't try and get out of that to-morrow."

"Not likely."

He went off whistling. What a spree to drive Sally home in the dusk!

CHAPTER III

IT was indeed the day of her life for Sally Snape. Charlie put his proposal in good form.

"Will you honour me by accepting a seat beside me in the phaeton?" he said when he returned from his interview with Alfred. "My pal prefers the bus; he seems taken with that friend of yours—Miss Murray, isn't it? I hope you are not afraid to trust yourself with me."

"Me! I'm not afraid of anything."

Sally was very flattered, very excited, very happy. She was glad Mary had found some one she could "take to." The gentility of Alfred was as definite as the gallantry and dash of Charlie. Each girl had found the man that suited her. Charlie cracked jokes with everybody. His compliments to Sally began to make her think she must be good-looking after all. His red necktie, his bowler hat, worn on the side of his head, rakishly, the pair of yellow-red driving gloves he produced, made a great impression upon her. He seemed a very fine gentleman indeed by the side of Luke Cullen, who appeared, just before she was mounting the step of the dogcart, and wanted to know "wot she was doin' of."

"Miss Snape is honouring me with her company for the drive home," Charlie explained gaily. "You can't have all the sweets for yourself, you know; she came down with you, she goes back with me; that's fair. Up with you, Miss Snape. So long, Cullen, see you to-morrow, fit as ever!"

Sally got into the dogcart nimbly, and Charlie climbed up after her, gathering the reins together in masterly fashion, so masterly, in fact, that the ostler, who stood by the horse's head, grinned from ear to ear. "Drunk as a lord," he said to himself, forming his wrong conclusion hastily. But, seeing him with red-haired Sally by his side, the ostler had a spasm of envy.

It was all very well as long as Charlie's vaulting ambition had not developed itself. But, either he got tired of jogging behind the omnibuses, or the broken-winded, spavined old horse got spurred by his imagination, they were very near London, so perhaps he scented his home and oats. Anyway, they were no longer entrenched behind the safety of the procession of other merry-makers when Lady Dorothea Lytham, driving her new 40-horse-power Panhard with her habitual courageous incapacity, suddenly appeared before their startled eyes, with no more idea of how to apply her brake than Charlie had of how to pull up his horse. He frantically tugged at the reins, the chauffeur frantically put his hand over Lady Dorothea's, on the wheel. But neither was in time to avert catastrophe. Lady Dorothea was smiling into Sally's startled eyes one moment, and the next was conscious of nothing but—smash!

She had no idea what she had done, or what had happened, who was hurt, or what was broken. She was still sitting grasping the wheel, she was probably even still smiling, for the impact found her so, and, being an Irish girl, and irresponsible, even beyond her country's ways, it was not likely that smashing up a dogcart was going to scare her.

But the chauffeur jumped out, there was something lying in the roadway; something that had not been there before. Lady Dorothea's graceful length quickly detached itself from the driver's seat. The trembling horse had recovered

his feet and was struggling between the broken shafts; Charlie and Sally had both been flung out.

Charlie had come to no harm; he was shaken and bruised and hideously frightened, but that was all. Sally lay where she had been flung, her head on the pavement, and her body in the road. In the light of the acetylene lamps of the motor she looked ghastly white and stricken. Lady Dorothea did not see her attractiveness then, or ever, although she had in the end to admit its existence. Perhaps their first introduction was responsible for her subsequent blindness.

"I'm afraid it's a bad job, your ladyship," said the chauffeur. He had been with Lady Dorothea for some time now, but her freaks never ceased to astonish him. Colonel Fellowes had said at lunch yesterday: "No woman ought to be allowed to drive a high-speed car; there should be a law against it." The butler had told him that, and, of course, both he and the butler knew that that was quite sufficient to tempt her ladyship to the experiment. But why she had made her first attempt in the dusk, and in the City Road, puzzled him. Lady Dorothea was rather baffling. Her husband, after a few bewildered years, had abandoned the effort to unravel her, and had returned from the South African campaign to his fastness on the Forth. Colonel Fellowes was still undaunted; but then he had never had any illusions about Lady Dorothea. He had known her before her marriage.

"You don't think she is dead?"

"She looks very bad, your ladyship," the chauffeur answered gravely.

"It was not my fault; you ought to have sounded your horn," Charlie exclaimed agitatedly.

"Oh, *you* think I ought to have sounded my horn?" Lady Dorothea said insolently.

She had no concern with the ashen little cad in his red tie, but she knelt on the ground beside Sally, felt her, spoke to her, tried to rouse her.

"She isn't dead," she said abruptly, rising quickly. "We must fix her up in the car somehow, and take her to the nearest doctor. Stop that Pickford's van: ask whether there isn't a doctor or a hospital near."

The Pickford's van man was both sympathetic and helpful. It seemed, too, that he had had "first aid" lessons:

"She's broke her leg and 'urt her head, concussion from the looks of her. Best let me take her in the van, ma'am; she can lie flat there; it's empty. We were goin' 'ome. We'll take her off to the London Hospital; we can get there in twenty minutes, and they'll know just wot to do. I took a pore chap there last week, and . . ."

"Oh, never mind about the people you've taken there before, my good man. What does that matter to me? Here's five shillings for you. Don't lift her in until I've gone, she might cry out. I should hate to hear her cry out. Come, Carter, start the car. You can drive, I've had enough of this, I want to get home."

Now a couple of belated policemen arrived ineffectively, and began taking dilatory notes. It was the handsome motor and its charming driver that attracted their immediate attention, not Sally on the pavement.

"Oh! who am I? my card? I haven't got a card—at least, I don't know where I put it. I'm Lady Dorothea Lytham, of Curzon Street. I'll send round in the morning and hear how she is. The man who ran into me will tell you all about it. Get on, Carter; I know she is going to scream."

Carter set his car going, he gladly took the wheel, with a whizz and a toot they were off. Lady Dorothea had shifted all the burden of the accident, and the injured

girl, on to other shoulders; hers were too graceful for bearing burdens.

And, somehow or other, the task was accomplished, after a little desultory conversation and some delay. The still unconscious Sally was made as comfortable as circumstances would allow, and lifted into the van. The van boy was spared to take his place beside the shaken, humbled Charlie, and gingerly to drive the disjointed dogcart to the stable. The débris of the accident was soon removed.

Sally awoke, somewhat later, to a painful semi-consciousness in a room hideously painted, small and bare. Her glazed eyes were caught by a sort of wheel that faced the stretcher-bed in which she lay, with wires hanging from it. The steel intricacies hurt her, she kept closing and opening her eyes, but it was always there, making her head ache. Her head ached so fearfully that the pain she felt in her leg was almost good by comparison.

Once, when she opened her eyes, there was another pair, behind glasses, looking at her.

"Wot's that 'ere?" she asked feebly, indicating the wheel.

"Oh! that? That's the Röntgen rays."

"Take it away, it's 'urting my head."

"We'll take you away from it, that's simpler."

The house surgeon, he was little more than a boy, was running hand and eye over her quickly, diagnosing, settling what was to be done.

There was no doubt about it, it was a case they must take in. Now he had to telephone upstairs for a vacant bed, and summon a surgeon from Harley Street. All the machinery of the great institution was quickly put in motion to relieve Sally Snape, half-unconscious Sally. She was wheeled on the stretcher to the lift, wheeled along

the polished floor to the ward, and lifted by two men, very tenderly, from the stretcher to the bed.

Then it was the women's turn. Sister Aglove came to look and direct, Nurse Hall and Nurse Darling to undress and prepare. Sleepy and querulous patients found a moment's inquisitiveness to spare from their own troubles, but the ward was soon hushed again in its selfishness of suffering. Dr. Grim gave his brief information:

"She has been thrown out of a dogcart, the right fibia is broken, there seems to be some head injury, not a fracture. I have sent for Mr. Farrant, he will set her leg here when he comes; chloroform won't be needed. . . ."

They undressed her so gently that she did not feel their ministrations. Her moans were quite unconscious, involuntary; she knew her head ached fearfully, but she did not mean to moan. They found her cold, and put a hot-water bottle to her feet; all that could be done was done for her before the surgeon came.

It was many days before Sally recovered sufficiently from the concussion to recognize her surroundings, to note, with her bright incurious eyes, all the routine of the hospital. Her case was not particularly interesting; a simple fracture of the leg, a slight concussion of the brain, no febrile or untoward symptoms. Yet, somehow or other, Mr. Farrant lingered by her bed, and young Dr. Grim, the house surgeon, found himself impelled two or three times a day to her side.

The nurses had cleaned and tidied her until she was almost unrecognizable. Sally found herself often gazing at her hands and nails. The hands looked white and small, the nails clean and short, they were like ladies' hands. Sally admired them, she knew now she would always keep them like this. Her hair had been brushed and combed until it shone like red gold; it was parted, and two great

plaited ropes lay on either side of her face. It was a pity the hospital costume was of red flannel; with green or with blue the effect would have been superb. As it was, it was only remarkable. The small face, with its green eyes and red lips, upturned nose and pallor, was unlike all the other faces that lay on the pillows, lacking the framing of hair and the indefinable attractiveness.

On visiting days Sally's bed was surrounded. Johnny came and brought her oranges; Sandy Kirk, to whom it was all familiar, remembered it was peppermint drops that had brought him most solace, and smuggled in a generous supply. Mary Murray came on Sundays, looking each week prettier, happier, less anæmic. Flowers were her gift, and it always seemed as if she had something to tell Sally, confidences to impart; but they were never alone. Luke Cullen came once, and sat by her bed for a solid hour, saying nothing at all, bringing no gift, conscious of his two pounds a week, forgetting he had not offered it, considering it and himself as accepted. Finally, Charlie Peastone came, after the lapse of two or three weeks, in a frock-coat and a bowler hat, pale lemon gloves, and a very jaunty manner. He did not think people like himself were often seen in hospitals. He was extraordinarily nervous, and chaffed the porter who let him in, and the sad-faced, weary people who waited with him. He brought Sally a bunch of roses and some new slang. She had the comparison with the doctors now, and a whole set of new standards. She did not appreciate his jocularity or his visit. She resented him.

People of extraordinary physical vitality, of really fine health and flawless constitution, resent pain or illness in themselves or others. They look upon it as something of a degradation, a personal offence; they want to run away from it, cover it up, forget it. This hatred or con-

tempt of illness is an entirely pure instinct, it is a reticence of the body, a *noli me tangere* of the soul. It was this that Charlie Peastone had done to her, he had degraded her. It was through him that she had headaches, and was forced to bear the handling of the doctors and nurses, through him she had lost sleep, and now was unable to move. That, in the main, she was happy and content here did not soften her toward him. Her marred body was his doing; all the time she had lain ill she felt the poignancy of her anger against him. She did not reason, none of her resentment was based on reason. But he had done this thing to her, and she hated him, and his talkin' ways, and their hours together. Now his jocularity was unbearable. She did not want his flowers or his gallant allusions. Luke Cullen's silence, Johnny Doone's corduroys, both suited her better. So she was silent and sullen during Charlie's visit, and even the news he brought her, that the firm would keep her place open for her, and would pay her half wages as long as she was on the sick list, did not incline her more favourably toward him. But then, it was not news to her, for the forewoman had written, and Mary Murray had verbally confirmed the letter.

It was on the non-visiting days that Sally Snape received the visits which interested her. Of course, she was glad of Johnny and Sandy. She was not one to forget old friends. But, somehow, her new cleanliness, regularity, order, coming at the end of her year at the factory and the continuation school, awoke in her some latent restlessness or ambition. Her clean white hands were never out of her sight, they were transforming her world.

Ursula Rugeley, busying herself always on the borderland of philanthropy, had an unofficial post in connection with the hospital. She read and talked to the patients in

Sally's ward. And just now Sally wanted to be read and talked to. She had grown used to Ursula, and, in a sort of odd way, the two understood each other. Sally had the capacity for both gratitude and friendship. Through Ursula she had left Limehouse and the tailoring; in laborious ways she had learnt to hold her own with Mary Murray in writing and cyphering. In those industrious evenings she had acquired other things besides writing and cyphering. She had learnt, sometimes, in a phrase or two, she thought she had almost caught, the way gentlefolk speak. Now that this personal cleanliness had come to her, and so strangely affected her, she recognized what the quality was she had admired in Ursula and her teachers. She had a somewhat contemptuous, vague understanding of Ursula's pursuit of charity as a fad and refuge from the tedium of her single life, but the knowledge did not in the least prevent her benefiting by it. She looked for Ursula's coming, she liked to make her talk, she asked her questions. Until Lady Dorothea Lytham came to see her, in a sudden mood of graciousness and revived memory, it was upon the prim and charitable Ursula that Sally Snape was unconsciously modelling herself.

Lady Dorothea over-rode rules and regulations, capturing porters, hospital secretary, and visiting doctors. She wanted to see a patient, she did not know the patient's name. She had run over her, or been run over by her. How long ago? She did not remember. Her chauffeur would remember; he was outside. Oh yes, she must see the invalid, she had brought her some flowers, white lilac and gloire de Dijon roses.

After all, she was Lady Dorothea Lytham, and had driven up in her finest of motors, and was tall and radiant in her ermine and young beauty, she gained her way, as she had a habit of gaining it. Porters and doctors and

secretaries aided her memory, and soon a selection of them escorted her to Sally Snape's bed. It was she who made that observation about the incongruity of the red hair and the red flannel dressing-gown. She said she would bring her some green or blue stuff instead, and, although she forgot all about it immediately afterwards, everybody thought it extraordinarily kind of her. And the flowers scented the whole ward, getting past iodoform and liniment, and making their own record.

"I'm so sorry I ran into you, or you ran into me; we never quite knew which it was," she began, when she got to the bedside. Ursula Rugeley was sitting beside it, a very dim figure beside this brilliant one.

Dorothea had a bird of paradise in her hat; it was a very daring millinery feat. She wore it because she had been asked to join some league about birds and aigrettes, she forgot exactly what it was, but she knew she had thought it great impertinence of the woman who asked her. And ever since then she had worn nothing but birds and aigrettes. Her manner was amazingly familiar; it was only if one took advantage of it that one realized it was founded on colossal race vanity. The distance between the Desmonds, Lady Dorothea had been a Desmond, and all the rest of the world was unbridgable; therefore Lady Dorothea could waft her familiarities across the line, but no breeze could bring back the echo to where she stood among her ancestors. It was a curious mental attitude. Drunken, dissolute, degenerate, the reigning Desmond had nevertheless the same point of view. He lived on the ill-gained gold of the creature he had married, and yet managed to be proud of his birth and position. Dorothea was the youngest of the family — two sisters had passed the ordeal of the divorce court; Lady Dorothea might eventually follow in their footsteps. But they were all Desmonds;

they, not less than the one who had married the Duke of Ebrington and maintained his rank. It was rooted in them, that the fact set them apart.

"What extraordinary hair you've got. Do you plait it yourself? May I sit down?"

She displaced Ursula gracefully:

"What a strange place! Why do they have all these beds alike, and those horrid basins? Oh no, don't wait, Mr. Evelyn, I want to talk to Sally. Sally is the name of the orang-outang at the Zoo. I declare, I think you have something the same shaped face. Awfully dull here, isn't it?"

"I'm not dull," said Sally simply. She loved the luxuriance of her visitor's clothes, her gay, light manner; she liked her impudence and familiarity. Sally, who never gained the trick of easy speech, admired immeasurably this flowing talk. It was very different from Charlie Peastone's banter; she felt the difference in every excited fibre of her as Lady Dorothea sat there in her ermine stole and brilliant hat, and yet more brilliant beauty, and asked questions:

"They tell me you are in a jam factory. That must be great fun; I love jam. I'll come and see you one day, and taste it while it's hot. But you oughtn't to be making jam; with hair like that you ought to be trying on hats, making people buy what doesn't suit them because they think they are going to look like you. One of my pals keeps a hat shop; she sells blouses and things too. I'm sure you'd like that better than jam. Shall I try and get her to take you?"

Sally's eyes sparkled, then her lids fell; she was still quite humble:

"Could I? Oh! ma'am, oh! my lady . . ."

Ursula had been listening; she seized on such a chance for her protégée.

"Of course you could. You might need a little training. . . ."

Dorothea's hereditary insolence was in the look she turned on the speaker.

"Who is this lady? A friend of yours?"

She asked about Ursula as if she too were in a pickle factory. She treated the explanation of Ursula's position at the bedside as if there were no intrinsic difference between philanthropy and factory work; both were such a long way off the Desmonds. Then, all of a sudden, she took Ursula into her confidence about Sally, and her hair, and her fitness for the show-room. The idea was a freak of the imagination. Carrying it into execution would need a sustained effort quite beyond her. She had so many things to do, she was in a hurry already. But this woman would go to Brook Street; she could not have anything else to do — no calls of society, or anything of that sort:

"I'll give you my card, and then you'll write, or, better still, go and see Vi. Here . . ." She wrote a few words on a card.

The jewelled case, the jewelled pencil, the quick action following the quick thought, were all wonderful to the red-flannelled, wide-eyed invalid on the bed.

"It's to Vi Farquharson; her shop is in Brook Street. I get no end of my things there. Tell her I insist upon it. And I'll come and buy some new hats as soon as Sally is installed. I must go now; I've a man coming to lunch with me. Let her come and see me when she leaves the hospital, before she goes to Vi's."

Then she turned to Sally.

"When you are in Brook Street I'll come and buy from you the chicest, newest hat they've got. It doesn't matter if it is *bizarre*, I can wear anything. And it doesn't matter what they charge, because I never pay!"

She laughed as she rose; she had a delightful laugh. She shook hands with Sally and nodded to Ursula. Everything she did had a certain grace and charm about it, though one felt that Puck was lurking in her tip-tilted nose, and in the eyebrows with the upward curve.

Lady Dorothea left Sally breathless, and excited, her heart beating quickly, and her pulses bounding. Now her slow-healing leg maddened her. Life was opening, her chance had come, and she could not move.

"Oh! how long will it be? Cannot you do something to make it heal quicker?" she implored the doctor, at his evening visit. She had a feverish night, but the next day Ursula Rugeley came to her again, calming and quieting her. Ursula told her how much there was she could do whilst lying on her back. She must learn finer needlework, she should read a little, she ought to try to improve her speech. There was a standard, almost of elegance, required in a West End shop. Sally was not afraid that she would not be able to pick up any trick that was wanted; she knew her acquisitive powers. But she did all that Ursula told her, and work calmed her. The nurses helped her, everybody sympathized with her, and helped to make the waiting time less long.

Ursula went to Madame Violetta's in Brook Street, presenting Lady Dorothea's card, and duly explaining her errand.

Violet Farquharson was a tall and worried-looking woman, somewhat deep in the forties. Her complexion was blotchy, and her temper uncertain. In her youth she had been flighty and vicious, but both lover and husband died of typhoid in South Africa, and her instincts were changed with her complexion and advancing years.

There was a boy to be supported at Eton, also a girl to be prepared for her matrimonial mission. Vi Farquhar-

son did the brave thing: she admitted her age, and went into business. Fortune favours the brave. She had the great, the incomparable good fortune to obtain the services of Mr. Perry and Miss Baines. It was they who enabled her to use her opportunities. For, of course, all her friends rallied round her, ran up debts with her, and sought for bargains.

John Perry was a remarkable personality. It had not been recognized at Madame Pamela's, where he had gone directly from his training in Paris. Madame Pamela's obtuseness became Vi Farquharson's opportunity. Miss Baines had been John Perry's fellow-assistant in Regent Street. She followed him faithfully to Brook Street, and from the time the two were installed, the business grew and grew. It was still growing when Ursula Rugeley brought Lady Dorothea's card of introduction to the establishment, but it was not yet firmly established. They could not afford to offend the impecunious Desmonds, with the stable Duchess of Ebrington in the background, and the Kidderminster connection. Lady Dorothea was still within the pale. She had grown up there, and there was still a corner for her, a well-dressed, if obscure, corner.

So Vi received Ursula with indulgence, if with irritation. It was two and a half years now since she had started in business, and eighteen months since John Perry had joined her. She had begun to have the pride of her success, to feel confident of the future.

"Dolly's always so inconsiderate. I can't train a girl in the middle of the season," she grumbled.

"She won't leave the hospital for another three weeks," Ursula urged; "then, if she could come to you whilst others were taking their holiday, I am sure she would quickly be of use. She is very industrious and steady; I've known her for years."

"But Dolly says 'the show-room.' Why the show-room? I'm short of bodice hands. Now, if she can sew . . ."

"She *can* sew. It is her appearance that made Lady Dorothea think she would be of more use in the shop. But she is ready to do anything."

"A factory girl! It's quite absurd. Dorothea is always absurd. And I suppose I am to pay her wages just as if she had been properly trained. And dress . . . who is going to dress her?"

Ursula undertook that she should have the requisite black frock. If she graduated to silk and the show-room, Madame Violetta would furnish her, for that was the custom of the trade. The interview was not suave, but then it was comparatively short. Vi rustled out of the room, after she had talked with Dorothea's strangely chosen messenger, to consult John Perry. And John Perry came back with her, and asked Ursula one or two pointed questions. Yes, she had a remarkable head of hair, and that was why Lady Dorothea had thought she would be useful to show off hats. She was slender, and Ursula believed she had a good figure. She was quite steady and respectable, not particularly good-looking, Ursula thought, but very industrious.

"We don't want to offend Lady Dorothea," John Perry said authoritatively, in a private few words with his employer. "No one wears her clothes better; it does us good for it to be known that we dress her. And she takes offence very easily. I don't think we can do much harm in giving the young woman a chance. More than likely her ladyship will forget all about her, once we say yes. We can get rid of her at the end of a month if she's no good."

John Perry was taking the reins very gradually, but very surely, from the manicured hands of his well-born mistress. He knew, from the first, the port to which he

was steering. He wanted to manage the business in his own way, he wanted no interference at all. Supreme power would come; it came nearer every day. For Vi Farquharson had gone into business completely ignorant of what business meant. Many of her friends had done the same, drifting easily into bankruptcy. She was making a success of it, and just as she had had sufficient intelligence to abandon the rôle of *amoureuse*, when she realized that it no longer became her, so did she perceive now that the position she would most fitly occupy in Brook Street would be that of figure-head. Mr. Perry was consulted about everything, and his decision as to Lady Dorothea Lytham's introduction was made quickly.

It was decided that Sally Snape should come to Brook Street. Mr. Perry thought she ought to pay a premium. "Never mind about the amount, but it would be something in hand. Catch Lady Dorothea in a generous mood, when she has money, and there will be no difficulty about it," he said. She had run over the girl, and that constituted a real claim. He had elicited all about the accident from Ursula. He advised Mrs. Farquharson to write, in the name of the firm, and say they were quite willing to give the young woman a chance; but they always had a premium with their work-girls. He even dictated the letter, so that it should be sufficiently firm, and yet not calculated to offend.

"Say we are quite full up, but that her ladyship's wishes are law. Say that we never take a girl with less than a hundred guineas premium, but that, this being an exceptional case, we will take fifty. You might add something about noticing that she has the same spirit of charity that animates her sister, the Duchess, and that we are glad to do our little. Put it so that she can't wriggle out of paying; the girl must bring the premium with her.

Lady Dorothea will get it out of somebody, if she hasn't got the ready herself."

Miss Rugeley was amiably told, after having been kept four minutes for the private interview with Mr. Perry, that Mrs. Farquharson was quite willing to take Miss Snape if Lady Dorothea would pay a small premium with her. Mrs. Farquharson told Ursula she would write to her cousin, and she had no doubt of the result. Miss Snape might consider the matter settled.

So it was arranged between Ursula Rugeley and Mrs. Farquharson that, as soon as Sally was fit to leave the hospital, she should go and see Lady Dorothea and get the money.

CHAPTER IV

THUS it came about that, some ten days later, the precise and formal butler in Curzon Street was startled by the apparition of Miss Sally Snape, with red feathers in her green hat, a shawl pinned round her slender figure, inquiring whether she could see Lady Dorothea Lytham. Sally was pale and thin, and limping; she seemed more limp than the lank feathers in her Epping Forest hat.

"Now what might you be wanting to see Lady Dolly for? She can't owe *you* anything," he said wonderingly, out of his large experience of Lady Dorothea and her ways.

"She ran over me. Then she came to the hospital, and said I was to come here," Sally explained, leaning against the lintel, rather spent and breathless. It was her first day without crutches, the stick had proved a fatiguing support, she looked very pale and pathetic.

"Well, you come in and sit down in the hall. I'll ring for her ladyship's maid, and see if you can go up."

Sally was glad of the coolness of the small dark hall. She sank wearily into the big porter's chair, one of the Desmond relics, that looked out of place in its present insignificant home; she leaned her head against its leathern side and waited patiently.

She had a long time to wait. Lady Dorothea sent down word that she would see the young woman when she had finished dressing. But Dolly's toilette was not a simple affair; her effect, of brilliancy and novelty, wealth and

exuberant youth, was not produced without care. Her hair, although nature had made it dark, curly, and abundant, needed the ministrations of her French maid to make it fashionable; it had to be brushed with brilliantine, waved from the face, with additional curls pinned at the back. When it was all carefully finished, she pulled it down, threw the curls away, and twisted it into a simple coil. This being her ordinary procedure, Claire made no protest. As for the curls, she had known milady would never wear them, but they matched her own very nicely; they were among the strange perquisites of her irregularly paid and exacting place.

Dorothea put on a simple muslin gown from Doucet's, and said she "looked a beast" in it. She tried a grey voile, and was not better satisfied. A quite new, very quaint, picture dress of flowered chiné was her final choice. But then the simple *coiffeur* was found to war with it, and for the third time her hair was re-done, puffed a little at the sides, and made in unison with her frock. At last everything was complete, the cheval glass consulted, and satisfied.

"I think I look rather nice."

"Milady looks *charmante*."

"Well, give me my handkerchief, and leave off pulling me down and patting me about. There's that girl waiting to see me. Where is she? Tell Parkins I'll see her in the drawing-room."

But it was now luncheon-time. Colonel Fellowes was in the drawing-room; he, too, had been waiting half an hour. But he had the newspaper and his cigarette, and he was used to Dorothea's ways.

"Hullo!" he said, as he threw away his cigarette and rose to greet her. "That's quite a new style, isn't it?" He did not shake hands with her, but she stood still for

inspection, and he looked over her carefully. "I like that — it's very good. Who's it got up for? Who's to be killed? I looked into the dining-room — laid for six. Who are the party?"

"Kiddie is coming, and the Middlecote girls. I don't know of anybody else."

"Sir Clement Dowling," announced Parkins, throwing open the folding doors.

She met him with both hands outstretched, and the most attractive smile:

"There! Now isn't that strange? I was trying to recollect who was coming to lunch, and quite forgot about you. I did ask you, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. In the park, this morning. Morning, Fellowes."

The two men nodded to each other. Colonel Fellowes, who was a man of about five and forty, grey-haired and upright, with a perpetual twinkle in his blue eyes, a smile habitual in the corners of his mouth, recognized the meaning of the omission of Sir Clement Dowling's name from the list of expected guests. Dorothea's subtleties were simple, and always delightful to him. Sir Clement was the very latest conquest: a Norfolk baronet, poor, a Catholic, and extraordinarily stupid; it would have seemed that a flirtation with him, whatever its nature, would have been an end hardly worth compassing. But Dorothea was eclectic, and Sir Clement had not yet quite realized what was expected of him, so the affair had still something of the charm of a chase. Also, Joan Middlecote had been spoken of as an obviously suitable marriage for him! Colonel Fellowes thought he was going to enjoy his lunch.

Clement Dowling's fair hair was brushed straight back from his forehead, his lustreless eyes were of pale blue, with light eyelashes; he was clean-shaven, and his weak,

indeterminate mouth and chin wore no disguise. But he was tall, of good figure and family, and faultlessly dressed.

The Middlecotes came in breathlessly late and apologetic. They were the twin daughters of that wealthy and eccentric politician, Lord Thanet. Their dead mother had been of the house of Ingleby. The wealth with which she had endowed them had not been her only legacy to her children. They were egoists, and of an ingrained vulgarity. Also both in fair Joan and dark Naomi there lurked a touch of an alien race; crinkly hair growing low on the forehead, lips moulded coarsely, a prettiness that could have been matched in the Whitechapel Road. Everything that could have been done for them had been done, but they lacked finish.

Of course, after their arrival everybody talked at once, about him or herself. Joan had been to Madame somebody or other for her massage, Naomi had galloped in the Row, lamed her horse, and been stopped by a policeman. She had seen Jack Desmond with Mrs. Vernon, and Harry Makin with his mother, and Laurie by himself. Joan wanted Dolly to try her *masseuse*, and Dolly laughingly answered that she would, when Joan's complexion was as good as hers. Everybody looked immediately at Dolly's glowing skin, and at Joan's dingy one; and everybody smiled. Sir Clement Dowling absolutely grinned. Of course, Joan reddened with annoyance, but was only subdued for a moment. Before lunch was announced she explained away the impression conveyed by talking of the fatigues of the last few weeks, and the freshening effect of the massage. It was just like Dolly to swagger her complexion, but let her sit up until three or four in the morning, four nights out of five, and see what she would look like! Joan knew, of course, that next to Dolly she was small, insignificant; but she prided herself on her vivacity. She

rattled out a volume of it over the *hors d'œuvres* and eggs, all to cover Dorothea's repartee.

Hors d'œuvres and eggs had both departed, and the trout was being discussed before Kiddie came in. A place had been laid for him, and left vacant, between Dolly and Naomi; he dropped into it:

"Hullo! nearly done? Sorry I'm late. What's this? Sardines! Skittles! Isn't there any cold meat about? I'm hungry, Dolly. What's there to eat? Tell 'em to go on where they were. Fish! Yes, I'll have some fish."

He started eating without more ado. He was such a very important young man that in any other house in Mayfair except that of Lady Dorothea Lytham they would, without doubt, have waited lunch for him. Perhaps that was why he came oftener to No. 200 Curzon Street than anywhere else. He liked Dolly; she had never treated him as a boy, even when he was a boy. He did not care a "hang" about her reputation, he did not believe everything he heard about her. He accepted unquestioningly Colonel Fellowes' position as her great friend. Kiddie had a way, in these early days, of accepting his relatives on their face value.

Lord Kidderminster, Kiddie, as he had been called ever since his Eton days, was the only son and heir of the most Honourable the Marquess of Fortive, whose services to his country have never been without the recognition of place. And Kiddie's mother was an invalid, living at Buckminster nearly all the year round; a power for good, a force in the real great world, but condemned to long periods of inactivity. With his invalid mother, and his statesman father, Kiddie had had more freedom than falls to the lot of the majority of young men of his day. And he also had a larger income. His father was

not unmindful of his needs, and his mother's full purse was as his own. It was understood that he was going into diplomacy. In the meantime he must see life.

With so much freedom, so much money, society was watching with interest for the sowing of his wild oats. He was twenty-two now, and, beyond leaving Oxford without a degree, they had been but a meagre crop. Kiddie was tall, well shaped, not ill-looking in a thoroughly commonplace way. There was nothing of the Adonis about him, but his skin was clear, and he had good teeth, rather handsome hands, and an air of being well groomed. He was eighteen before he had reached the upper school at Eton. Nevertheless, he was no fool, and he had, like Dorothea, a definite appreciation of his own importance. Also he had an unusual and deep affection for his mother, and a genuine respect for his father. Their treatment of him had made him respect their judgment. The men of his year said "Kiddie was not a bad chap."

The fact was that, being an only son, he had never been quite a boy, and therefore was a man with his youth yet to come, a tough papyrus upon which the stylus of life had as yet made but little mark.

He had a boy's appetite, however, and it had to be satisfied before he began to talk. It was not very eloquent talk then. It was more like the tipster's column in "The Sportsman" than anything else, all about Goodwood, and his horses in training there, and other people's horses in training there.

Quite suddenly, apropos of nothing, with a huge piece of plum cake in his hand and a lump of it in his mouth, he said:

"That reminds me,"—he had been talking of Sonora's chances for the Goodwood Cup—"Dolly, who's the interestin' invalid that's asleep in the hall? She looks as if

she's come from Hampstead Heath, feathers and all. Is that the latest Cerberus? Is she goin' to answer the door? I asked Parkins, and he said primly that he 'had had no instructions from her ladyship.' Who is she?"

"Good heavens!" Dolly was conscience-stricken, and laughed gaily. "I had forgotten all about her. It's Sally Snape. You know I told you all about her. It's that girl I ran over the night I tried the new Panhard. I said I'd see her when I was dressed. I'm going to make Vi Farquharson take her; and, by the way, Kiddie"—she turned her laughing eyes on him—"now you've reminded me, you'll have to help. Vi's frightfully stingy; she wants me to pay a premium."

"I should think from the look of her she'll die on your hands, and save you the money. I never heard about this feat of yours. When did you manage it?"

"Ever so long ago. Six weeks, I think. Then I went to see her in the London Hospital."

"Oh, Dolly, you never told us!" chorused Joan and Naomi.

"She did good by stealth," quoted Colonel Fellowes, with the twinkle accentuated.

"Now don't you belittle my philanthropy." She turned quickly on him. "It's too bad of you. You know you thought it awfully sweet of me to go."

"Of course I did. And to let her come here to thank you."

He got up and lit his cigarette, dropping the match neatly among the palms in the grate, then added coolly—

"And I think it very kind of you to let her wait two hours in the hall, when probably she is just out of hospital, and has had nothing to eat since eight o'clock this morning. It's not three yet. I think you are quite wonderful to remember her when Kiddie reminds you."

"It's easy enough for you to laugh at me. I'd like to know what you ever do for poor people."

"Abstain from running over them," he answered, "that's all. Why don't you tell Parkins to take her down to the servants' hall, and give her some dinner?"

"I was just going to."

"You can finish your cigarettes, and then come up to the drawing-room for five minutes," she said to Colonel Fellowes; "you don't deserve more, and I can't spare it either, for Sir Clement is driving me down to Ranelagh, aren't you, Sir Clement?"

He had not heard of it before, but stammered out an eager acquiescence.

"Kiddie, you really must help me with this girl. You know I'm a pauper, and Vi won't take her without the premium."

"Well, I'll have another look at her first. I must have something for my money."

"How perfectly horrid of you."

Sally was given some dinner in the servants' hall. Fearfully tired, her scarcely mended leg aching badly, quite as faint with hunger as Colonel Fellowes had surmised, Sally was a sympathetic object to a kindly cook and a curious footman. They talked to her of the accident, and the day in Epping that had preceded it. They warned her not to take "too much store" by anything her ladyship might promise to do, for her ladyship had a habit of forgetting! But their warnings did not depress Sally, who, by the time she was sent for upstairs, had had a very good dinner and a large glass of wine, and felt full of hope and expectation.

The girl whom Colonel Fellowes met on the stairs had colour in her transparent cheeks, green light sparkling in her strange eyes. The red hair was roughened some-

what under her feathered hat, but the disorder only betrayed its luxuriance. The shawl hid her figure, the stick disguised her walk; but, even then, she was remarkable on the Curzon Street background.

"Is this the young lady, Parkins," he said pleasantly, "that her ladyship ran over?"

Arrested in her limping progress, Sally eyed her interlocutor with the boldness of the East End in its holiday mood. And it was a figure worth looking at, with its soldierly head carried erect, the blue eyes twinkling humorously in the lean brown face. Colonel Fellowes' forty-odd years had greyed his hair and grizzled his brushed-up moustache, but there were no other signs of age about him.

"I'll take Miss Sally upstairs. It is Miss Sally, isn't it?" he said to her. He retraced his footsteps, he had been going out. "Your leg still weak, isn't it?" he said sympathetically. "I broke mine once, on a tiger hunt, and I remember it was months before it felt like the other one."

"Sort o' numb," she said, "that's what mine's like."

"Put your hand here, on the banister, that will steady you better than the stick. Give me the stick."

"You're very kind."

He looked at her:

"Everybody is kind to pretty girls," he interjected.

Then they were at the drawing-room door.

"Are they?" she asked wonderingly.

She did not want him to go. She wanted him to come in with her, she thought it would be beautiful to hear him and Lady Dorothea talking; she was marvellously excited. But Colonel Fellowes had never committed an error of tact. He had said good-bye to Lady Dorothea some minutes ago, and left her with Lord Kidderminster. Sally's vividity

had brought him back these few steps, but it could not lead him to such a *bêtise* as a return to the drawing-room. He said a reassuring word to her, and told her at which door to knock.

"Perhaps we shall meet again," he said, and was gone. Sally thought him a very kind gentleman, then dismissed him from her thoughts.

Kiddie, who wasn't exactly mean, although no one ever accused him of flinging away his money, was wrangling with Dorothea over the amount.

"I don't see why you should practise driving a six-cylinder car in a crowded thoroughfare, and I should pay the piper," he grumbled. "Make Vi take her without a premium, and I'll get Gwen to have some clothes there."

"Don't be so beastly mean. Sit down and write a cheque at once. I'm ashamed of you. Oh! here she is! Come in, Sally. This is Lord Kidderminster, he's going to pay your premium at Madame Violetta's because he's so sorry you broke your leg. Aren't you, Kiddie?"

Kiddie looked up sullenly, and met the green, sparkling eyes. And Sally, though nervous, was not abashed; the wine was bubbling in her veins.

"I'm that grateful," she began, she smiled her gratitude with trembling lips; "and to your ladyship."

"Oh, that will do, you can sit down. I suppose your leg is shaky still?"

After Kiddie's eyes had met the green ones, he turned to Dolly and said in a low voice —

"All right, don't make a fuss about it. What was the good of telling her who I am? Come here a minute, and I'll give you the stuff."

Dolly followed him leisurely, and he counted out the notes.

"Why do you want Vi to take her?" he asked. "It's an amateur show at best."

"Oh, it's easiest. Thanks, old boy, I'll take it round myself to-morrow morning, and get a hat out of her on the strength of it. Run away now, there's a dear. I must say something to the girl, and Sir Clement has been waiting for me for half an hour."

"Poor old Cis," he put in. "Is the Clement Dowling game going to last over Goodwood? Shall I have to ask him down to Royston?"

"I rather think so," she answered impudently. "But don't hurry with the invitation. I'll let you know in lots of time."

Sally was glad to be alone; she had never been in such a room before, never known there were such rooms. It bewildered her. There were so many things in it, mirrors and bric-à-brac, cushions and draperies, and flowers; it was heavy with the scent of lilies. She had smiled at Lord Kidderminster almost without seeing him; her senses were absorbed by the radiance of Dorothea. And Sally had the dress instinct, she could have described the flowered chiné; she did describe it, in fact, later on, to both Mary Murray and Ursula. She had not much time to make notes about it, for Dorothea dismissed her in a couple of minutes. It was all right, she was to go to Madame Violetta as soon as she liked, and Lady Dorothea hoped she'd "have a good time, and do well."

"And don't frizzle up your fringe like that. You looked much nicer in the hospital. Vi — I mean Madame Violetta — will be horrified if you go to her like that. Go to that nice woman, I don't know her name, but she was sitting with you when I came into the ward, and ask her to dress you up — put you into black or something dark. I don't want Vi — I mean Madame Violetta — to laugh at me for sending her such a figure."

Lady Dorothea was not afraid of hurting Sally's feelings;

she never thought of anybody's feelings. That was one of her foibles that kept Colonel Cecil Lytham at Glenuttoch, or with his regiment. And Sally's sensitiveness, at the moment, was of a grateful rather than of a resentful kind.

Ursula Rugeley had already promised to help her. She was to stay with Ursula for a week before she took up her duties in Brook Street. She was to have a week in Chepstow Villas, Bayswater, during which time she would get back her strength and learn many things. She was only eighteen, and the rise in life was a big one. Mary had said she envied her when Sally had told her the news yesterday. Then it was still uncertain, almost too good to be true. Now it was a fact. Her ladyship had said so, Miss Rugeley had confirmed it; the premium had been paid. She was really going into a West End business, to learn the millinery, to be in the show-room, to see and speak with ladies, be constantly among beautiful clothes, and enter a new world!

But Mary Murray, although she professed envy, was just now full of happiness. She had found a little private paradise of her own, and the factory of Messrs. Hall & Palmer was all alight with the glow from it. True, she was in the factory, and *he* was in the counting-house. But Alf was not proud, and he knew that she was really genteel, and not like an ordinary factory girl. They were going to wait, both of them would save; but meanwhile there were half-holidays and Sundays, and some fine evenings. Life was now all golden to Mary Murray, and she had temporarily forgotten the tragedy of her thin hair. She confided everything to Sally in return for the Brook Street confidences, and Sally listened, secretly rather scornful. Sally had seen too much of marriage to think well of it; marriage in Angel Gardens had meant ill-treatment from drunken husbands, much child-bearing, misery accentuated,

doubled by the yoking of two beasts for one burden, the burden of common poverty. As for love, that had been another name for disgrace and degradation, worse even than marriage, and with the same brutal ending. She was not clear in her ethical code, and was incapable of reason. She knew nothing of what Mary tried to tell her, of mutual sympathy and understanding, of the dawn of tenderness, of the gradual absorption of two timid natures into the beauty and mystery of sweet love. Of the joys of the little home Mary and Alfred were beginning to picture, Sally Snape also knew nothing. A semi-detached villa in Dalston, with white curtains to the windows, and red geraniums in boxes; perhaps a slip of a garden, Alfred for whom to cook and his clothes to mend, Alfred to call her "little wifey," and come home to her each evening — a home, and she the centre of it. That was Mary's beautiful dream, a dream of which Sally was as yet incapable.

She listened, indeed, but was conscious that she would a thousand times rather go to learn the millinery in Brook Street than marry anybody. Mary had hinted at the possibilities in Charlie Peastone's visits. She had failed to understand Sally's sudden and unaccountable dislike to him. Of course, Luke Cullen was out of the question. Sally looked so "genteel" — it was Mary's favourite word — in the clean tidiness of the hospital get-up, that Mary understood that Luke, notwithstanding his two pounds a week, was no match for her.

Johnny Doone, too, urged his suit.

"Marry me, Sal, when yer get out of the 'orspital, and come back and live with me and Sandy. We 'ad fine times before, and we'll 'ave 'em again. I carn't think why yer 'anging back. You say you like me better nor anybody. I'll bring you back my wages reg'lar. Yer know I don't drink."

"No, Johnny, you don't drink, but you loaf a lot," she replied thoughtfully. "And the drink comes. It's all very well when there's work to be had, but when it's slack . . ."

Sally had been up for the first time when Johnny made his offer, sitting in a comfortable chair in Mary Agnes Ward, still in her red bed-jacket, with her stick by her side, rather pathetic in her weakness. Johnny's brown eyes were very soft when he looked at her. He was only a young dock labourer of nineteen, and his Sunday visiting suit was modelled on a costermonger's, but he knew more than Sally did.

"But, Sal," he said, "if I got you I wouldn't drink, nor slack." He put a grimy, hard hand on her knee, his voice was not perfectly steady, and he had forgotten there were other people in the ward:

"Sal, I love you. I've always loved you, Sal. I don't want you to go back and work in the factory. I'll take care of yer, and work for yer. I love yer, Sal. . . ."

She threw his hand off touchily:

"I hate such talk," she said.

And so, having snubbed Charlie Péastone, rejected Luke Cullen, and "choked off" Johnny Doone, she was quite free, and without followers, when she left Curzon Street to stay for a week with Ursula Rugeley. Everything she learnt there was of use to her, but the few hesitating and uncertain words of warning which the old maid tried to get out about "temptations" that came to good-looking girls were wasted. Sally was much more outspoken than Ursula Rugeley; their traditions were so different.

"Them things don't tempt me," she said calmly. It was quite the end of the week before she learnt to say "those." "There's no temptation to me in men loafing about after yer, drinkin' and quarrellin'; I've seen too much of it. You must have a chap to go out with on a

'oliday, that stands to reason, but it won't never go no further with me. I really hates them, seen too much of 'em. It's other things I want, not young men."

She was quite certain and cool about it; she said she could "take care of herself," and Ursula, not without admiration, began to see there was truth in it.

It was a strange week the two passed together. The villa in Bayswater was exquisitely kept, and furnished in the best mid-Victorian manner. Ursula had inherited it, just as it was, from the querulous and paralytic old man whose slave she had been for so many years. She had rebelled during her mother's lifetime; from twenty-one to thirty she had raged against the dull dutifulness of her home life, the cramped round of daily duties, the routine visits, the ungenial relatives. She had fought for years to be allowed to become a hospital nurse. The retort that she could nurse her father and mother, which was the privilege of an only daughter, left her defenceless. At thirty-eight, when her tardy freedom came, she could do nothing, because she had learnt nothing, except housekeeping, and she had acquired the wits that go with it. But she had her comfortable income and house, and she took philanthropy as a pastime, to fill her empty days, not even knowing at first that it was a vocation needing a long apprenticeship and rare talent.

The visit to Angel Gardens, when she first met Sally, had been her initiation. In the five years that followed she had learnt the first letter in the alphabet of her work, she had learnt sympathy. She was mastering the second more rapidly, the subordination of self.

She had not wanted to have Sally Snape as a guest in her house. Mary and Jane, the housemaid and parlourmaid, having been with her so many years that they were "set" in their ways, might resent the intrusion of the

factory girl. And endless tiresome questions arose. Was Sally to have her meals with Ursula or in the kitchen? What was to be done with her when guests came? Ought she not to have decent clothes provided before she became a guest in Chepstow Villas?

All these perplexities were in Ursula's mind when Sally came in after her visit to Curzon Street, but her pallor and fatigue seemed to solve them. Once Sally had sat down in the drawing-room, and Mary had brought her tea, it seemed absurd to think of her having it elsewhere. And, because she walked so uncertainly, Ursula helped her afterwards to her bedroom, staying to ask if she needed help. Then, before she left the room, she hesitated at the door:

"I dine at seven-thirty," she said. "It's six now. Wouldn't you like to lie down for an hour and rest?"

Sally's gift of silence helped her. She had had her dinner, and thought Miss Ursula meant supper. But she talked in a strange way, and Sally meant to copy it; calling dinner supper, or supper dinner, didn't amount to much.

She liked her room, she liked it immensely. It had been Ursula's own in the days when Mr. and Mrs. Rugeley were alive and she was enslaved by their affectionate tyranny. The small brass bed had been hers, and the suite of walnut furniture, also the hanging bookshelves filled with the works of Jane Austen, with "Little Women," and "The Mother's Recompense," and similar studies. The Brussels carpet remained shabby as of old, the autotypes that adorned the walls were religious in character. Sally admired it all, even to the strip of painted and mackintoshed cloth that was nailed behind the washhand stand. Already, too, she hated her clothes, and the hat with the bedraggled feathers.

Ursula was quite willing to talk about clothes, and she noted with approval Sally had tried to smooth her rebellious hair, and that her hands and face were clean. Of course, table-napkins, finger-bowls, the differences between fish and other knives, presented difficulties. The fried whiting was separated from its bones and eaten with a dessert spoon. It was embarrassing for Ursula, and quite shocking to Jane, when Sally took the bone of the pigeon in her fingers, leaving marks of its degustation round her mouth. Sopping her bread in the gravy, and cleaning her plate with it, were minor matters after that. But she was quick to see that her table manners differed from those of her hostess. She was watching all the time, and she knew she would get things right presently. The finger-bowls were an intense surprise to her. At first she expected to see goldfish in them. It was funny the way gentlefolk dined. She thought it a very bad dinner, by the way. Hot tripe and half a loaf of bread, three pennyworth of liver and potatoes, washed down with beer, would have satisfied her appetite better. But Ursula was a teetotaller, and, like many women who live alone, she had arrived at a minimum of food. The three courses were a sacrifice to cook and conventionality; a fried whiting, a pigeon, and a custard pudding seemed to her a large meal for two people. The coffee came in the smallest cups Sally had ever seen. There was no milk served with it, and Sally, although she drank because she saw Ursula doing so, thought she had never tasted anything so nasty.

"I have bought twelve yards of black merino, and engaged a dressmaker to come and help you make it. I inquired of Mr. Perry, and he said you must be in black, but the smarter the better if you were to go to the showroom; he'd make up his mind when he saw you It will be that or the work-room."

"I don't care which."

"But I think Lady Dorothea will care." Ursula Rugeley, too, had been impressed by the impulsive manner. "It seemed to me that that was her intention, and, since she has been so kind, you must try not to disappoint her."

"I ain't going to disappoint her."

That first night Ursula abstained from commenting on the grammar:

"Then there is the question of hair, and . . . and hat. I did not quite like the one you had to-day," she said delicately.

It represented a week's wages and an infinity of discussion between her and Mary Murray, also many visits to many shops in the Borough and other popular quarters; but already Sally herself did not like it.

"They give me half wages all the time I've been in 'ospital. I can get all I want."

"The merino is my present to you; you must not spend all your savings. Nothing was said by Mr. Perry about wages; the girls live in."

"I've always earned all I wanted."

"Well, the great point is, how ought the dress to be made?"

"Couldn't I go and look in the winders to-morrow, and see the fashions?"

"It isn't exactly the fashions we want. We want to know what is expected for your position."

"Gals in show-rooms?"

"They always call them 'young ladies,'" said Ursula perplexedly.

Sally showed all her teeth at that, smiling as if she liked the sound of the two words.

"I'll be all right," she said confidently.

Afterwards they sat in the drawing-room, and continued

to talk about Sally's outfit. The drawing-room furniture was rosewood, and it was upholstered in tapestry. Sally quickly saw the difference between this clean, simple room and the luxuriant fulness of the Curzon Street sanctum, with its pictures and jade, ivories and silver, flowers, sofa cushions, and palms. The mischief of it was that she so greatly preferred the Chepstow Villa style. All the woodwork shone, and one could see everything at once in the clearness of the incandescent lights. There were water-colours on the walls, amateur efforts for the most part, a picture of Mrs. Rugeley, and one of Mr. Rugeley, with whiskers, in the place of honour, and also some one's faded grandmother, with side curls and a simper. Some daguerreotypes, and a seascape in a gilt frame, that had been won at a raffle, completed the wall decoration. Sally liked the china vases with dyed grasses standing on the round table, where the bound books lay so regularly. The lustre-pieces on the mantel-shelf were beautiful to her, and so was the ormolu clock. There was not a speck of dust anywhere, and for the first time in her life she sat where, from the wide-open windows, came no sound of brawling, no smell of dirt or poverty. Everything was peaceful in the quiet street.

It was decided, before they went to bed, that Ursula should adapt, or buy her, a quiet hat, and a black coat: with these and her present skirt, she could venture, on some pretext or another, into a West End shop and take a mental picture of what the saleswomen were wearing. Then they would fashion a dress at home, and perhaps a blouse for the interview with Mr. Perry that was to decide which post would be given to Sally.

CHAPTER V

THE Sally Snape who presented herself to Mr. Perry at nine, punctually, on the eventful Monday morning that witnessed her first professional appearance in the West End of London, was not only decorously, but becomingly dressed. And she made an immediate impression.

It was wonderful what the week had done for her, notwithstanding the limited mênus. They had been supplemented with morning and evening milk, and like milk was the creamy pallor of her skin. Her green eyes, with the dark lashes, shone brilliantly. She had no colour, her nervousness banished it, only the lips had a touch of pink; breath came quickly through the short tip-tilted nose. She had discarded her stick, she held her head erect, notwithstanding its burden of red plaits. Even a tyro could see the possibilities of the young svelte figure in the neat black dress.

Mr. Perry was seated at his formidable office table. He did not attempt to rise, but motioned Sally to stand opposite to him.

John Perry was a man with a personality; whether one liked the personality or not depended on the individual taste. All Mr. Perry's business life had been concerned with women, and the wonder of their clothes. His appearance was striking; his figure big, but failing to give the impression of strength, an excess of flesh apparently covering little bone or muscle. He never stood straight upright, with legs together, but always slackly, often sitting

down or leaning against something, a weakness of attitude incongruous with an apparent strength of build. His face was handsome, reminiscent, with its dark hair, of the Napoleon tradition, but a Napoleon over-fed and over-indulged, with small aims. The smooth, heavily falling flesh was set in few but well-defined creases; the jaw was massive, but formed by indolence and not achievement; the mouth closely shaven; his dark eyes were bright, alert, full of intelligence, almost of genius.

Mr. Perry was always well groomed, and it was obvious that he bestowed time and thought on his clothes. They were well cut and dark: an ample, double-breasted jacket was worn over a rather showy striped black and white flannel waistcoat. His thick bull neck necessitated a turn-down collar; his black necktie was loosely tied, and carried a handsome pearl pin. His clothes were neither conventional nor eccentric, they were merely expressive.

His manner, at the best, was impatient; at its worst, brutal. Sally Snape found him imposing; he arrested her attention, filling her horizon immediately, and blocking all other light.

"Stand over there; don't you understand what I say to you?" was his first impatient order to her. "I want to look at you. So, you are the young lady that Lady Dorothea Lytham recommended. What can you do? that's what I want to know. What can you do? Take your hat off, please. Be quick about it, it won't do to drowse about here. Now, Miss Baines, please, Miss Baines." He raised his voice. "This is Miss Snape. Where do we want help?"

Miss Baines, who came quickly at his call, from some inner sanctum shrouded with mysterious dress closets and drawers, and littered with big wooden boxes, was Mr. Perry's right hand. She had golden hair, elaborately

dressed, and she rustled in elegant silk garments. But she was a business-woman nevertheless.

She came through the curtains and eyed Sally with just the same frankly professional air as John Perry, but more kindly, less impersonally.

"We want help everywhere," she said. "I'm sure I don't know where to turn first, we're driven to death."

But this was quite a perfunctory speech. Miss Baines was always overworked, and driven to death. And, although she was never to be found far from a glass, and the arrangement of her hair was an almost hourly ceremony with her, she was yet one of the most capable forewomen in London, and a tower of strength to any firm.

Sally, with arms upraised to remove her hat, showed a grace of figure and gesture that led Miss Baines' eyes to Mr. Perry's. They understood each other perfectly, these two; they had worked side by side for seven years at Madame Pamela's. Their mutual glance said, "Showroom."

Sally had parted her hair in the middle, as Lady Dorothea had advised, and, under Miss Rugeley's guidance, had made one huge plait of it to wind round her head, a new fashion then, but one that speedily came into vogue.

"Is that all your own hair, child?" said Mr. Perry, with the same abruptness, but in a kinder tone than he had used before. He did not like the protégées of great ladies, and had been prepared to dismiss Sally to the obscurity of the work-room. Sally's sudden smile at his question was good to see.

"I haven't had no money to buy false."

"No money! haven't had no money! Oh, Lord!" He turned to Miss Baines, and again they mutely questioned each other.

"Why don't you say 'any money'?"

Sally reddened at that; the slight flush on the milky skin warmed her whole face.

"I forgot," she said meekly. She had learnt so much in the past week that it had got congested. "My hair is all my own. Shall I take it down?"

"No, no. Here, you . . . one of you boys . . ." Again he raised his voice, and more than one errand boy in the elaborate uniform of the establishment ran in. "Go up to Miss Thompson's and tell her to come down here with the box of millinery that came from Paris this morning. Tell her to hurry." Then he turned to Miss Baines: "We'll try her with the Ribout models; those plaits must come down an inch to fit the bandeau."

Miss Baines asked Sally a few questions whilst they waited.

"Sally Snape! Oh, we don't know 'Sally' here. Miss Sarah Snape, I suppose you mean. And what have you been doing up to now? Can you sew?"

"I was in the tailoring."

"In the tailoring," she mimicked good-humouredly for Mr. Perry's entertainment. "And where may that have been? At Poole's?" Mr. Perry laughed. Both were in good humour, they knew they had a find. They were of a rare type, whole-hearted in their business. To them was due the fact, soon to become generally acknowledged, that the establishment in Brook Street was the only one run by a lady which was a real success. Sally's catechism was of no moment; her head and figure were just what they needed, they only talked to her to pass the time.

"Kirstenblum was the name," Sally answered simply.

"Did you do any trying-on there?"

"The trousers?" she asked in bewilderment. "Why no, marm, I . . ."

Of course they both laughed.

"Since then I've been at Messrs. Hall & Palmer's. I was in the jam there, but I made my own pinafores."

It was characteristic of Miss Baines and Mr. Perry that they talked before her as if she had not been there. After a few more questions and answers, Miss Thompson and the millinery not having yet appeared, Mr. Perry said:

"She'll want a lot of training. Meanwhile, if we use her at all this season, she'll just have to be taught to hold her tongue. Now, what are you going to do with her, in or out?"

For whilst some of the young ladies at Madame Violetta's were accommodated on the premises, the bulk of them had to make their own arrangements. Miss Baines thought, and Mr. Perry thought, then simultaneously they exclaimed—

"Miss Carthew."

"Have you made any arrangements for living?" Miss Baines asked.

"Miss Rugeley said I was to live in."

"That is the lady who came to us about her from Lady Dorothea," Mr. Perry explained. "I suppose it's all the same to you whether we pay your room outside or here?"

"It's all the same."

Then there followed a strange hour. For Miss Thompson arrived with the millinery, and she and Miss Baines, under the animated guidance of Mr. Perry, dressed Sally up, now in this, now in the other, beautiful garments. Her hair was pulled forward by one, loosened over her forehead by the other, spread out behind her ears; then a hat was perched upon it, a feathered stole being placed around her neck. She was ordered to walk this way and that. The peremptory order always came from Mr. Perry, who stood a little distance off.

"That will do, Miss Thompson," or "That will do, Miss

Baines; take them away, please. Now try on . . . so and so, or so and so."

He ran through a dozen models with her, sometimes leaving the adjustment to the women, sometimes coming over himself, tying a bow, adjusting a feather, on one occasion taking out a couple of hairpins and shaking her hair loose, then pinning it up again to suit a French monstrosity of flowers and tulle.

It was amazing to see him at work; his instinct, and the perfection of his knowledge were so intimate, so exact. His well-made hands moved, one had said, intellectually, among the chiffons, making unerring effects. He never made an alteration that was not an improvement. His taste was extraordinary, his certainty remarkable.

Sally looked well in everything. The women silently acknowledged it, and Mr. Perry showed his satisfaction by calling Sally "child," and ordering her to move this way or that, quite kindly. He habitually bullied the girls, but few of them resented it. It was so obviously impersonal; they were not girls to him, only lay figures. His clever fingers manipulated the clothes they bore, and, when he was disappointed in the effects, it was natural he should be irritated at the cause, their awkwardness, or unsuitability, their carriage or carelessness. They saw him almost the same to the ladies who came to be fitted. He would rush upstairs to the fitting-room, enter without ceremony, no matter in what stage or condition of toilette the ladies might be, and, after a moment's contemplation, he would take scissors or pins from the quiescent tailor or fitter, and rip out a sleeve, tear off a trimming, or reconstruct a bodice, totally disregarding the feelings of his client. *He knew.* That was the secret of it. He had an instinct, a feeling for woman's dress, that never erred. The man himself was quite unique.

This was almost the beginning of his career. Here, for the first time, his genius was recognized and his authority upheld. At Pamela's he was the nominal head, but without a free hand. Here he was the nominal subordinate, but the very real head. And already the result was declaring itself.

Sally resented nothing Mr. Perry did or said, and, with her quick perception, rapidly began to understand what was required of her. At eleven the first customer came, and, after the usual silent consultation, Sally was told to follow Miss Baines into the show-room, to hold her tongue, and keep her head up. At that moment her black dress was surmounted by an exquisite confection of Tuscan straw and roses, and round her neck was a ruffle of real lace caught together with the same flowers. She carried the daintiest of muffs, and stood quite silently whilst Miss Baines exhibited her to Miss Mosenstein, who had arrived, accompanied by her mother and two sisters, to select some garments for her trousseau. Miss Baines' methods were those of a mother with a new baby:

"Aren't they lovely?" she said to Mrs. Mosenstein. "Mr. Perry brought them back with him from Paris only last night; he wouldn't leave them to be sent on. *You* ought to have them, Miss Mosenstein. They would go with that white *voile* of yours at Goodwood. Lady Wenlake wore a set rather like them at the Grand Prix, and the Grand Duke asked her where she got them. Doucet had an order for the set in sable and ermine, with white stephanotis; Mr. Perry saw them, he said they were exquisite. Would you like to try them on? Do stand still, child." Sally had not stirred, but Miss Baines gave the ruffle a little pat, and the muff a little caress.

"Aren't they lovely?" she said again, contemplating

them with her head a little on one side, as if lost in admiration.

What Mr. Perry had really said, and said in Sally's hearing, was:

"That lot won't do. Edgware Road. Put them back for the sale. No, stay, there are the Mosensteins. They shall have them. They will suit Miss Amy best, the tall one; they won't look vulgar on her."

They did not bite very readily, and Mr. Perry was called.

"Very smart, aren't they?" he asked of Mrs. Mosenstein. Then he took the ruff off Sally, and personally flung it round Miss Lilla's neck. Next he gave her the muff, and contemplated the effect, first close, then from a little distance, then further off. He came forward distressed, and shook his head.

"No, they don't suit her, they won't do. There is too much of it for her." Already all the Mosensteins were in a flutter of excitement; it was not often Mr. Perry attended to them personally. The personal attention of Mr. Perry was rapidly becoming the goal of ambition of every woman who "dressed" in their particular social set.

Mr. Perry talked to Mrs. Mosenstein for fully five minutes on indifferent subjects, the weather, the London season, motor cars generally and her new Renault in particular. Then he told Miss Lilla abruptly that she was to wear an Irish crochet wedding-dress, over dead white *merve*, the lace was to be very fine and specially made for her. She was to have a biscuit-coloured cloth going-away dress, hand-embroidered with orange blossoms.

"I have been thinking things over whilst I was talking to your mother." He considered her as if she was at last his chief objective. "Miss Jones, Miss Plummer," he raised his voice. "Come along, you girls, please, put on . . ." so and so . . . and so and so . . . a list of

clothes that were to be exhibited to the bride-elect. He stayed whilst the girls paraded in white lace over silk, and in embroidered cloth. He went into intimate detail about Miss Lilla's figure, and explained how he would alter this model, and adapt that mode. He was sitting confidentially beside Mrs. Mosenstein on the lounge during the greater part of this parade.

"That will do, that will do," he said at length, rising stiffly. "I will see all the clothes fitted. Now then." It seemed he was suddenly aware that Sally was still standing by him, the muff and ruff having been restored to her. "Take that off, no, wait a minute. There, that will do." He had seized her ruff and the muff again. He made Miss Amy, the youngest and prettiest of the Mosensteins, stand up as if she had been a model. "Take your hat off, please." He even spoke to her just the same way. She was a handsome Jewess with black eyes and hair, and a bright colour; the fanciful garments undeniably suited her.

"Pull your hair out a little, you wear it too tight," he said impatiently. "Now take the muff. That's right." He made her parade in front of the glass. She looked undeniably handsome; on her light muslin dress the things made more effect than over Sally's black, or her sister's brown.

With an air as if he were conferring a great favour he turned to Mrs. Mosenstein. He had seen her expression; he had even gathered that Amy was the favourite daughter, he saw the light of admiring love on the fat face of the mother.

"That will be a triumph," he said; "you shall have these for the bridesmaid dresses, simple cream frocks, in voile or taffeta; hats, ruffles, and muffs to match." He was extraordinarily triumphant, posing Miss Amy whilst

he talked, altering the poise of the hat, patting the muff into position.

"I call that a good morning's work, settling the wedding-dress, the going-away dress, *and* the bridesmaids'. Oh, excuse me, that is the Countess of Laffan just coming in. I must speak to her. Miss Baines. . . ."

Miss Baines hurried to take his place. She congratulated Mrs. Mosenstein on all that had been done. When they settled down in earnest to discuss prices, and the sums took away their breath, she was very ready to suggest economies.

"Why not have imitation instead of real Irish?" and then the difference in price was threshed out. "Or violets instead of roses? Those roses are specially made for us; you'd be surprised if you knew what they cost us. Why, we pay a guinea for every rose that comes into the place. Mr. Perry won't have any but the best. Why not have violets?"

By the time Mrs. Mosenstein was wavering between roses at a guinea and violets at seven-and-six, Mr. Perry had finished with the Countess.

"Mrs. Mosenstein thinks she would rather have the wedding-dress of a cheaper lace." Miss Baines spoke apologetically, she hardly liked to trouble him in the matter. Mr. Perry never discussed prices, it was not his department. He always said he knew nothing about money; he knew about clothes, and how they ought to look. It was Miss Baines who attended to these sordid details.

He would not listen to the suggestion of cheaper lace for the wedding-dress, or violets instead of roses. He pooh-poohed the idea.

"Either have the whole thing, as I have said, or don't have it at all," he said impatiently. "Believe me, it will be a failure if it's not carried out exactly. Why do you

go behind what I say?" he asked Miss Baines querulously. "You know it would look poor and trumpery."

"Oh, yes, *I* know," she said, raising her eyebrows.

Mrs. Mosenstein felt the implied rebuke. All her bargaining instincts and habitudes were lost before this arbitrary dictator.

Sally got her first lesson in business that morning. She was sent out of the show-room presently with orders to see that the things were put away carefully; they were not to be taken out again.

Miss Thompson had promised to show them to the Duchess, but the Duchess must be disappointed, they had been selected for the Mosenstein wedding, and no one else could have them.

"But you won't object to having them sketched for 'The Chatelaine,' will you?" Miss Baines begged, and, of course, the Mosensteins were delighted that their bridesmaids' dresses should have this publicity.

About four times during the day Sally was sent forth wearing these same exclusively reserved garments. She noted that when Miss Baines exhibited them they were admired but unsold. On the solitary occasion when Mr. Perry had leisure to attend to Miss Baines' customer, his authoritative dictum of "complete suitability" was always accepted. Once gardenias were insisted upon as being more recherché, a new word for Sally, than roses, and *their* price became the extra guinea; the roses, having now sunk to seven-and-six, were treated contemptuously by Mr. Perry. Roses were not "chic," everybody had roses.

"Oh, no, milady, really you must not have roses. Why, in Paris nobody wears roses this season, gardenias are all the rage. I was at the Grand Prix last Sunday, and . . ."

The story went as before, with its trifling variation, and again the sale was effected.

Sally's first day gave her completely new impressions. She was full of them when she walked home somewhere about eight o'clock that evening with Elfrida Carthew, the companion selected for her by the united wisdom of Miss Baines and Mr. Perry.

Elfrida Carthew was a very pretty girl; she, too, had been at Pamela's before coming to Brook Street. An interval of two years had elapsed between her leaving Pamela's and applying for work at Violetta's. But both John Perry and Miss Baines guessed where she had been.

"Well, Mr. Perry, you know yourself I can sell hats," she had pleaded when she was asking to be taken on. "I made a fool of myself when I left you before, but it won't happen again."

"You must see that it don't; we don't want any but respectable girls here."

"Oh! as for that . . ."

"No, I don't want any explanations; you were always inclined to be impudent. If we take you on you'll have to behave very differently."

Elfrida was very young, barely twenty-one, and she was very hard up. Miss Baines was sympathetic and curious, Mr. Perry was off-hand and domineering; but both of them were willing to take her. For, as she said, she was a good saleswoman, and if it were true that she had been idle and impudent in the Regent Street days, she was humbled for the moment, and ready to put up with both of them.

And they had taken a practical view of the matter.

"He has thrown her over, I suppose?" asked Mr. Perry, who never indulged in gossip, but always listened to any with which Miss Baines favoured him.

"Yes; he has had to rejoin his regiment. I don't think he made any provision for her. She has been ill since he left; I heard she had to go under an operation."

"Well, the experience has done her good; she holds herself more upright, puts her clothes on better. She has been about and seen things. I suppose she will behave herself, and not get talking to the other girls?"

"I think she is in rather low water. But she is not the sort of girl we can be very sure of. She'll find some one else."

"We can't stop to think of that. She might do very well for herself one day; she's got the figure. But don't let any one hang about her here; we can't allow that, you know."

It was only last week that Elfrida's engagement had commenced. They had not been able to find room for her to live in Brook Street. It was not part of their business to safeguard her from temptation. There was no doubt her adventure had improved her manners. She was more lady-like, less impudent, a better saleswoman all round, and more in tune with the refinements of their business. She had been rough, unformed, somewhat common:

"Miss Snape wants polish," Mr. Perry had said. He had laughed when Miss Baines said she would get some knowledge of the world from Elfrida Carthew. He had a deep-rooted contempt for women and girls and their little vices and vanities. But he recognized that Miss Sarah Snape was more unworldly than the majority, that she probably had even more to learn. He thought it a good idea that Miss Carthew should be entrusted with the first toning down of that crude material.

Elfrida was more than willing. She hated being alone; she was acutely alone just now. She and Sally quickly fraternized. Now they were walking home together.

"This is your first venture in business?" she asked Sally curiously. "Do you think you are going to like it? Mr. Perry has taken a fancy to you, I don't envy you

that; you'll be called out ten times to everybody else's once, you'll be bullied before customers, and told how to do your hair, and lace your stays, and hold your shoulders. Oh! he's a fair caution, he is. He hates me; he just lets me do my work, and never interferes. Of course, it means our department won't pay as well as the downstairs hat department. But, thank heavens, he can't be everywhere."

"Don't you like him?" asked Sally wonderingly.

"Like him!" Elfrida made an expressive grimace. "I should think I don't. Who could? He treats you as if you were made of wax or wood, he don't know the difference between a girl and a wire figure; he's an overbearing, bullying . . ."

Words failed her. She had tried to get up a flirtation with Mr. Perry in the old days, and, when she looked well in hats, or sold hats well, Mr. Perry had called her "child," and been kind to her. But when she had been low-spirited, and the new models had failed to suit her, when a customer had tried her beyond her limited patience, and she had been curt and unsuccessful, he had never given her a word of sympathy.

"He isn't a man at all," she told Sally; "he's a machine. How many times have you had that lace and rose set on to-day?"

"Five or six."

"And you'll have it on eight or ten to-morrow."

"I like showing off the things," Sally said earnestly. That was the voicing of her first definite impression. She liked seeing herself, feeling herself, in the fine things.

"Do you?" asked the other satirically. "And perhaps you like Mr. Perry?"

Sally thought for a moment, and then answered truthfully —

"Yes, I like him," she said. The rest of the way to her new home Sally's companion found nothing to say.

As the days of her apprenticeship went on, these views deepened and became confirmed. She liked trying on the beautiful clothes, looking at herself in the glass, becoming daily more conscious how well fine raiment became her. She liked altering her hair to please Mr. Perry, and to suit his Paris purchases. She liked the vaguely-growing consciousness of her good looks. It was undeniably true that Mr. Perry had taken a fancy to her. He had her constantly with him, she was for ever being sent for, being rapidly buttoned or hooked into this or the other confection, being turned round and exhibited in embroidered muslins and ermine stoles, in lace paletots and picture hats, in opera cloaks and motor coats, in feather boas and evening toques.

And Mr. Perry spoke of her to Miss Baines. There was no secret about it, every one heard him. He said—

"That girl looks well in everything; they all suit her, and they all fit her. Come here, Miss Snape, please." It was always "Come here, Miss Snape, please," and some new way of dressing her up was devised.

Of course, it was impossible to be an artist in clothes, like Mr. Perry, and not realize that Miss Sarah Snape had the most exquisitely slender figure, rounded girlish breasts and slender waist, just the right length from supple hip to knee. It was never the women who saw any beauty in her, but few men could miss seeing it. She was perfectly formed: the small, rather flat little head, with its wide brow and ignorant eyes, was set upon the prettiest of white throats.

Before Sally came to Brook Street it had been the custom to exhibit evening frocks over a light pink or cream-coloured jersey. The young ladies wore these as they walked round

to show the *décolleté* garments. But after Sally's coming, and in consultation with Miss Baines, Mr. Perry decided that Miss Snape could show the evening frocks as they should be worn, with the neck and arms bare. And they sold a phenomenal number of evening frocks during the first month of Miss Snape's coming.

At first Sally had hated the ordeal, growing red and hot and uncomfortable under the observation of the customers, or of Mr. Perry. She had hated and resented it, when, in adjusting a tucker, tying a ribbon, placing or replacing a flower, his spatulate warm fingers had touched her skin, or his close vicinity to her had tried her composure. But extraordinarily soon all these feelings had worn off. It was impossible for Sarah Snape not to realize that, wherever Mr. Perry's clever fingers might wander, Mr. Perry himself never wandered from the subject in hand. And that subject was always dress, the completion of it, the fitness of it, the perfection of it. Whatever strange home or personal life Mr. Perry might lead outside business hours, inside them, in Brook Street, his genius was one-sided. That Miss Snape looked better than any one else in his purchases or creations was, all this time, her sole *raison d'être* in his eyes. He did once ask her how she was getting on with Miss Carthew, but it is doubtful whether he waited for the answer. *He* was getting on, the business was getting on, better than it had seemed possible. Already all fashionable London knew Mr. Perry, and even those who resented him had to admit his authority. There had never been a man milliner in London to take the place that the first Worth had held in Paris in the sixties. Mr. Perry was fast rising to that place.

Vi Farquharson, realizing the position quickly, offered him a partnership about this time. He had brought neither

capital nor connection to the business, yet it was the wisest step she ever took.

He had no time to recognize a human being in his mannikins, even if now, or ever, the girls had interested him. Once or twice he had corrected or mimicked Miss Snape's English, and the error made under those circumstances was never repeated. And once, as has been said, he asked if she was happy with Elfrida; that was all the intercourse between them.

Yet his influence was paramount with her, his and the clothes.

Externally Miss Snape was developing daily. She was becoming a devotee to her body. She found herself looking in her glass as often as Miss Baines. She kept her hands and nails scrupulously clean, and devoted one hour in the evening, however tired she was, to brushing her hair. She was beginning to speak quite correctly, and she bitterly resented the poverty that prevented her dressing, out of business hours, in anything but the poor black frock, which, like the rest of her toilette, had been Ursula Rugeley's present.

Spiritually she was not growing at all. All the week the shop held her entranced, on Sundays its influence still held.

She asked Elfrida in early days —

"Is Mr. Perry married?"

"Married? Oh Lord, no! Fancy a stick like him marrying!"

"Oh! I suppose him and Miss Baines . . ."

"Don't you believe that. I suppose some of the girls have been talking. I thought, at first, that there was something between them. Miss Baines is married. I don't know what her name is — Jones, I think. Her husband used to call for her every night of her life when we were all

at Pamela's. He is manager to those dry-cleaning people; she puts a lot of work in his way. They've got two children, and are ever so devoted. I've met them at the theatre together . . . when I was going to theatres." She sighed.

Sarah had heard all Elfrida's short history by now. She had had "a friend." He wasn't very rich, but he was very liberal. It wasn't his fault that he was a married man, he'd married before ever he met her; he couldn't help that, could he? He'd had to go back to Egypt with his regiment, or she wouldn't be here now.

Miss Snape heard of the delights of their days together, of dinners and suppers at the Savoy, of trips to Brighton and Margate, of a dear little flat near Victoria. But long before the holidays, Sarah found herself practically sole possessor of the room they had been sharing together. Elfrida was always too busy to walk home with her of an evening; she was very smart in her clothes and seemed restlessly happy and excited.

"Don't you let on in Brook Street that I'm not living here altogether," she told Sarah. "It's all the same to you, and you can have a friend in if you like. I may come back, who knows? But I like my freedom."

Her manner was tentative; she seemed to expect to be asked for explanation, but Sarah had not enough interest to be curious.

Sarah used her freedom to see her old friends. Elfrida was not as congenial to her as Mary Murray, although perhaps she learnt more from her. Sarah scarcely knew what there was about Elfrida that repelled her. None of her instincts were based on reason, they were a child's instincts.

This was the time Sarah began to question and cross-question Mary Murray as to her relations with Alf; how

it began, how she knew he liked her, how she first knew she cared for him; also about the life they were planning, and its details. She grew almost as familiar with those ideal rooms in Dalston as Mary and Alf were themselves.

After one of those conversations she used to wonder what Mr. Perry's home was like, where he lived, and who looked after him. On Sunday afternoons, those hot days when Elfrida gave her all the liberty of their mutual home, she would repair to Chepstow Villas. She worked hard at her education. She was eager now to acquire French, having mastered reading and writing up to a certain standard, and definitely rejected arithmetic. She told Miss Rugeley she thought the language would be useful to her in business, there were one or two French girls now in the show-room. She did not tell Miss Rugeley, possibly she did not know herself, that she wanted to understand what Mr. Perry said to them.

"Do you know you've got ten days' holiday?" Miss Baines asked her presently. Miss Baines could not help feeling a certain human interest in the people around her. And Sarah Snape interested her. She did not seem to understand much more than when she first came, although she did all that was required of her. Of course she imagined herself in love with Mr. Perry, that was a phase all the young ladies went through. But what she did with her leisure hours now, and what she would do with them in the future, interested Miss Baines, also what Elfrida was teaching her.

"She'd be better if she woke up a bit," Miss Baines told Mr. Perry. "She is not a bit like the other girls."

"Oh, she'll come all right. Wait until some one takes a little notice of her."

"She'd like you to," said Miss Baines, curiously.

Mr. Perry never did take any notice of the girls, she

had never detected him in the least *simulacrum* of a flirtation. Their own relations were, and always had been, purely business, and her own boundless admiration and fealty were based on the fact that she was intelligent enough to realize his genius. It was genius, unique. She was proud to follow him, gleaning his harvest; it was her profession to understand him, and, where she could, to help him.

It was after that word Miss Baines dropped that Mr. Perry met Sarah, for the first time, outside the business atmosphere of Brook Street. Sarah had been to the play with Mary and Alf. It was always a lament with Mary that Sally had not found a young man yet. She and Mr. Peastone promised to be such friends, and it had come to nothing. Johnny Doone wasn't possible, outside the East End; Luke Cullen had at last been turned off by the firm after a séance at Bow Street.

Alf had had two seats for the upper circle given him, and Sarah paid for her own. It happened that they — Madame Violetta & Co. — had "dressed" the leading lady, and one of the minor characters. Sarah wanted to see the result. She was becoming daily more and more absorbed in dress. She hardly listened to the play, a social comedy that dealt with manners and customs to which she was a stranger. She saw Mr. Perry in the stalls — his opera hat and glasses, his satin-lined coat and obviousness held her. She thought there was no one like him in the house. And, notwithstanding her inexperience, she was probably right!

It was in the hall they met. It was a wet night, and the crowd took long to disperse. Mr. Perry's brougham had been called, and called again, but still it tarried. Sarah called, through the crowd, she was "all right." Alf hurried Mary away, he was fearful lest she should catch cold, so

solicitous about her that he had no attention to spare for her friend. And Sarah had lingered, unwilling to face the rain, perhaps in the hope Mr. Perry would "notice" her.

Mr. Perry did notice her.

"You here, Miss Snape?" he said. "That wretched man has been half an hour finding my brougham. What a night!" Then his eye scanned her professionally, and very keenly Sally felt the disadvantages of the perennial black merino. She was aware of her rising colour, her eyes when they met his were deprecating. He remembered what Miss Baines told him.

"You should get yourself an evening dress, Miss Snape," he said. "Why not green chiffon? Chiffon is cheap enough. You could run it up at home; off the shoulders, wide in the skirts. Then, if you had your hair waved, wide at the sides, flat in the middle, and perhaps a flower under the left ear, you'd look quite different."

She saw herself in the costume; her heart leapt.

"I've been in the upper circle," she protested timidly.

"Alone? Surely not alone?"

"No, I had two friends with me. They — he — wanted to get out of the wet," she explained confusedly.

Mentally, of course, he had dressed her for the stalls. His familiar manner was only part of his general contempt for women. There was nothing personal to Sally Snape in it. He had a very genuine admiration for her shape and movements; he was really the first person to see her possibilities.

"I'll give you a lift home," he said condescendingly. "You can drop me in Sloane Street, and then my man can drive you to Gower Street, isn't it?"

She actually found herself, a few moments later, by the side of the great Mr. Perry, rolling along the streets of London in his rubber-tyred brougham. The coachman

wore a cockade, the livery was quiet. Sarah felt acutely the proximity of Mr. Perry's commanding presence, his satin-lined coat. Mr. Perry used scent, and that, too, fascinated Sarah.

"It's — it's very good of you," was all she said. He thought it was, for he was bored by her, and her clothes had an irritating effect upon him. What was the use of such a figure, such hair, if that was how she hid them? Black merino! He got as far from it as the carriage allowed.

He talked a little of the dresses they had made for the stage, and Sarah, who was discovering a taste, made an observation that appealed to him:

"She's added that emerald clasp to the opera cloak since we sent it home. She oughtn't to have done that, it's too heavy for it."

"Oh! you noticed that?" Now he spoke to her with something like interest.

They were already at Sloane Street. He hesitated before he got out of the brougham. He was tempted to make the girl come upstairs with him. He had bought some pieces of old brocade, and was almost too impatient to wait until the next day to see how they would hang. He would have liked Sally upstairs for an hour, her bodice off, trying the effect of the lengths, deciding between *directoire* and *empire* styles; his mind was full of the brocades, but he had no scheme yet.

"I wish you could come in with me," he said. And his voice had a regretful note. She felt herself growing very red in the obscurity of the brougham.

"But I suppose I mustn't ask it," he added impatiently.

"It's very good of you," she said again.

"Not at all. Well, be early on Monday. Two hundred and forty-seven, Gower Street, James. Think over that evening dress. Good night."

CHAPTER VI

FOR many days and many nights Sally thought of little but that evening dress, and how to obtain it. It seemed the one, the only way to attract and hold Mr. Perry's attention. She would have so liked to see his house, where and how he lived. He had thought of asking her, hesitated about it, and the black merino had made it impossible! She had seen his expression when his eyes fell upon it, she had learnt to read his expression.

Sixteen shillings a week was all they gave her upon which to live, the difficulties of saving sufficient for the *chiffon* gown were insuperable. Elfrida was again at home, rather melancholy and down on her luck.

"What are you going to do for your holiday?" she asked Sally. "I feel I don't care what becomes of me. It's a hateful world. You look peaky too. What's wrong with you? You're still in high favour, aren't you?"

"I wish I could have some new clothes, I wish I had a little more money."

"Hullo, that is a new note, isn't it? I thought you were so happy, so content, in trying on other people's things." Elfrida was bitter and satirical. "I've never been satisfied nor content. I hate work, and I hate poverty. Why should Mrs. Carter have that beautiful plumed toque to go on her hideous artificial wig, over her bulbous nose, whilst I, young and pretty, have only got the fun of seeing what an owl she looks in it! You've had every one of those trousseau things of Lilla Mosenstein's on you; she'll be as fat as her mother in no time — I know

these Jewesses — and then see how she will look in an embroidered biscuit zouave! *You* could set them off."

"Biscuit is not my colour," broke in Sally.

"You've got that from Mr. Perry," she said contemptuously. "It's all rubbish; any colour is good enough for a good-looking girl. But that is just it — we've got no chance, you and I. I'm sick of it all."

There was certainly something in what Elfrida said. Sally was young, she did not know whether she was pretty or plain, but she knew she could look nice if only she got a chance. From nine until eight she was at the shop; sometimes she stayed even later, to help in hanging up, or folding away clothes, in leaving things tidy. Sally was always ready to work, she had never been an idler. All the girls liked her, she was industrious and never spiteful; she was silent, because she was still uncertain of her speech, but she was learning, always learning.

Mr. Perry went away in July, before the sale was over. It was dull work then in Brook Street, monotonous, weary work, all the savour gone out of it.

What was she to do with her ten days' holiday? Mary and Alf were going to have a week at Eastbourne; Mr. Peastone might be there, Mary told her slyly. Surely she must have got over her silly prejudice against Mr. Peastone by now. The accident was none of his fault. And if it were, he had done all he could. He had been to see her in the hospital, and had taken her flowers.

"He told Alf my friend was very hard-hearted, but he didn't mind that so long as she was very red-headed! He is always full of his jokes, real good company, I call him. Come down to Eastbourne along with us, and make it up with him. There's no saying what might happen. After all, if it hadn't been for him you wouldn't be where you are now."

That was certainly an argument. But when Sally thought of Mr. Peastone she could not forgive him all she had suffered. The degradation of her helplessness, and the memory of the things that were done for and to her, during the first days in hospital, hurt her modesty past forgetting or forgiving. The ineradicable quality of her childishness put the responsibility upon him. She had trusted him, she who, before that day in Epping, had only trusted herself. No! she hated Mr. Peastone, and told Mary so. She would not go holiday-making in his company.

In the end she went to Brighton with Elfrida.

"I can't go alone," Elfrida said; "you might as well come along. There's no saying what might happen; you never know yer luck, as the saying is. We may pick up something to amuse us."

The class of adventure for which Miss Elfrida Carthew was on the look-out had no appeal for Sally Snape.

They went down together in a third-class carriage, and they took a bedroom in a back street. Then, the very first day, Elfrida put on all her best clothes and told Sally to do the same. It was Sunday morning, and they would go on the Parade.

Sally's best clothes were a poor affair: a white tulle bow was added to the black merino dress, two gardenias — which had not cost a guinea each, by the way — tied up with black velvet, trimmed her new crinoline hat. However, she made a good contrast to her companion. It was, and it remained, a mystery to Sally, how Elfrida contrived to have such very smart dresses in spite of her limited income. To-day she was in a tight tailor-made blue cloth, and her toque was all of violets. These sat well on the fluffy gold of her elaborate hair. She had added a little rouge to her cheeks, but, when Sally admired her colour, she failed to explain how it was achieved.

Elfrida secretly thought Sally's pallor unattractive, and her appearance dowdy. She thought it would look as if Sally were her companion or sheep-dog if they went on the Parade together, and Elfrida's superficial study of men made her think they liked best what was difficult to obtain. With Sally she felt as if she were going out "chaperoned." That Sally was half a foot taller, with the loveliest figure in the world, while the colour of her hair was finer and more attractive than the finest clothes man had ever devised, never entered Elfrida Carthew's silly little head.

Therefore, when every idle man turned round to look at the pair, Elfrida adopted an air of conscious unconsciousness, and began to prattle gaily:

"Don't look round, but did you see that fellow who looked at me? He was a friend of my boy's, Captain Gordon. He recognized me right enough, I shouldn't be surprised if he stopped and spoke next time we passed. The girl he's got with him is Minnie Mason, she used to be at the Grecian. That's Lord Kidderminster, 'Kiddie' they call him. You see, it's off season here, so they can bring any one they like."

Sally had recognized Lord Kidderminster, and, stranger still, Lord Kidderminster had recognized Sally. That is to say, he knew her face was familiar to him, and involuntarily raised his hat, although he could not recollect where he had seen her before. He searched his theatre-memory in vain as he strolled past.

"Fancy his bowing to me," giggled Elfrida. "Impudence, I call it. Harry Gordon pointed him out to me one night at the Carlton; I've never even been introduced. Let's turn the other way and pass him again. I'll give him a good stare, pretend I don't know who he is, and then suddenly remember and bow. I shouldn't be surprised if we had a good time here after all; there is nowhere like

Brighton for meeting your pals. P'raps he motored down. Hullo! there is Joe Aarons."

She nodded and smiled at the theatrical agent, then advanced toward him as if she was sure of welcome.

But Mr. Joseph Aarons was not in business to-day, he was holiday-making. He gave her a nod and a "how do," but he made no attempt to stop.

"Spiteful thing! He thinks I want an engagement out of him."

It was obvious that Elfrida was cut to the quick by Joe Aarons' careless greeting.

"An engagement?"

"Yes; didn't you know I was on the stage once, in the chorus at Roma's? Harry arranged it for me; he knew Joe Aarons well. It suited Harry that I should have something to do; you know he had to be at home sometimes. I liked it well enough, a pound a week and my clothes, it might have led to something better. Then Harry went away, and I got ill . . . my place was filled up. I tried to see the manager, but there are always crowds of girls hanging round, waiting for an engagement. It's no good without influence. I tried until I'd spent all my money. You saw how off-hand he was. He wasn't like that when Harry gave him a champagne lunch at Prince's, and me in a stylish frock from Jay's, and . . ."

But Joe Aarons' off-handedness was apparently but a momentary matter. He was standing before them now with both hands outstretched.

"Well, now, to be sure — Miss Carthew, isn't it? And how is Miss Carthew? Very well, if it's as well as she's looking. The sea suits you."

He was more than friendly, he was quite enthusiastic. His quick professional eye had spotted Sally the very moment she had passed him. Elfrida was another thing

There were scores of girls like Elfrida Carthew, and they all wanted engagements. He wasn't down here on business. If Elfrida had had eyes for anybody but herself she would have noticed that he had been walking with Mrs. Aarons and four little olive branches, the boys in Eton suits, the girls with flowing curls and feathered hats. This was their annual outing.

But Miss Carthew's friend was a remarkable-looking young woman. Mrs. Aarons was in delicate health; her attentive husband thought she had been out long enough. When he had seen her safely across the road — Mr. Aarons as husband and father was a totally different person from that gentleman during office hours — he startled and gratified Elfrida by the warmth of his greeting.

Soon it transpired that he had no idea she had been ill; he had missed her at Roma's, and concluded she had gone out with Captain Gordon to Cairo.

"So you let him go alone? Well! I never; he was a nice boy, but there are plenty more, my dear, plenty more. You must come back, to the Verandah, eh? Who's your friend?"

Elfrida introduced Sally.

"Miss Snape, Mr. Aarons."

They were standing on the wide white flags of that part of the Parade which separates the grass from the gravel paths. The sun was dancing on the distant sea, and the roll and plash of the waves had begun to speak to Sally, to speak to her so loudly that they drowned the vulgar voices and speech of the two beside her. She smiled her acknowledgment of the introduction, and then turned away.

"God, what grinders!" Aarons had said to himself as he went on exchanging chaff and theatrical small-talk with Sally's golden-haired companion. And the same thought, perhaps differently expressed, was in Lord Kidderminster's

mind as he sauntered past the little group. He looked hard at Sally; he couldn't "place" her, but he knew he had met her somewhere. Judging from her companion, he guessed it must have been in some theatrical under-world. It was strange, if that were the case, that she cast no glance in his direction. Kiddie was not used to being ignored by young ladies in any world.

But Sally had not seen him. She had heard of the sea, and dreamed of it; now the big moving panorama of it was before her. And she turned her whole self toward the new and absorbing immensity. In her eyes was the sparkle of the sun on the waves, while the sea-wind flushed her cheeks and rippled the red gold of her hair.

"Oh, isn't it *fine!*" The exclamation was involuntary, so was the sudden turning to Elfrida for sympathy. But it was not Elfrida who understood and responded. It was the Jew.

"Very fine, my dear; a very fine sea this morning. Fond of the sea?"

"It's the first time I've seen it."

"The . . . the first time you've seen it!"

Elfrida was annoyed. Why did Sarah give herself away like that?

"The first time she has been at Brighton, she means," she interrupted hastily.

"No! I mean the first time I've seen the sea at all," Sally persisted. "It's just wonderful. . . ."

Joe Aarons looked at her. He had been looking at her more or less all the time. But now the colour and expression on her face arrested him completely.

"Wonderful! And where may you have been living, if one may ask?"

"In the East End most of the time; we never took jaunts like other people."

She was carried out of herself and all her traditions, the exhilaration of the ozone was upon her. She turned away from him again as she was speaking, and faced that immutable moving blue, with the white foam on the crest of the high waves.

"I *do* like it!" she said, and forgot her companions again in its contemplation.

"Who is she, my dear? Where does she come from?" Joe Aarons asked in his thick voice, moving a little away from her, confidential with Elfrida.

"She was in a factory somewhere in the East End. One of our customers — I am at Madame Violetta's now, you know, that place in Brook Street — one of our swell customers ran over her, and got Violetta to take her as a sort of compensation. She is a queer girl, she doesn't know anything about life. You should see her eyes when I talk to her sometimes."

"It isn't her eyes," said Joe Aarons incautiously, "it's her figure and her teeth."

"You don't think her good-looking, surely?" Elfrida cried, jealously. "A red-haired maypole!"

"No, not to say good-looking," he corrected tactfully, "but interestin', certainly interestin'. Where are you two stopping?"

Elfrida gave the address.

"And what may you be doing with yourselves tonight?"

When she admitted that they had no particular engagement that night, he asked them both to dine with him at the Majestic.

"It will be like old times, when I supped with you and Harry Gordon. We must see if we can't fix you up with something. It's a pity to waste a girl like you in a hat shop."

And in that Elfrida agreed with him.

When Joe Aarons gave a party he did the thing in style.

The girls arrived at the hotel at eight o'clock that evening, according to arrangement, and found Mr. Aarons planted on the rug in front of the fireplace in the hall, very prominent, very self-important, already with his guests about him. The company consisted not only, as they had anticipated, of themselves and Joe Aarons, but also of Miss Minnie Mason, who immediately began to gush over Elfrida, Captain Carstairs, who had accompanied her, and Mr. and Mrs. Heseltine. The Heseltines had a distinguished position in connection with the local music-hall; Elfrida told Sally hurriedly about them in the cloakroom.

Fortunately Elfrida and Sally were dressed for the occasion. That is to say, Elfrida was in a somewhat stained but very elaborate confection of red silk and lace, and she had generously urged upon Sally a somewhat scanty and out-of-date white blouse. With a rose at the waist, and another in her hair, the inevitable black merino and white blouse became evening costume. Very striking Sally looked. She had not been three months under Mr. Perry for nothing. Both roses were exactly in the right place, the only place. The natural wave of her hair, which was parted in the middle and coiled low, outshone the hairdresser's art that gave Dot Heseltine and Minnie Mason the charm of wax-work dummies.

From the very beginning things went well. Minnie and Elfrida were delighted to meet each other again, and had a thousand confidences to exchange. Dot Heseltine, who was a middle-aged monstrosity of some fourteen stone, a marvel of amiability and experience, liked nothing better than to enlighten the ignorance of young girls. Captain Carstairs revelled in inferior company, where, as he put it,

"no one put on frills," and a man could do as he liked. Tom Heseltine loved to eat and drink at another's expense; and, as for their host, Joe Aarons, he felt, instinctively, "right to the bottom of his boots," as he expressed it, that this new girl was "good business."

Joe Aarons, as a "theatrical agent," had an extensive connection with the halls. He was a fat little Jew, who wore a diamond ring on his stumpy finger, another diamond blazed in the middle of his white shirt; he had black eyes, a bald head, a hooked nose, and hospitality was ingrained in him.

"Make yourselves at home, that's what I want, sit where you like. No, no, not on my lap," he began facetiously, when they moved into the table d'hôte room. "I know what you're after, Mrs. Heseltine, but Tom and me has been friends too long. Here, my dear, you sit by me," he said to Sally, "and, if Tom takes the other side, he can have one eye on the missus and the other on the gal,' as the saying is. Now, don't you think, Miss Carthew, I've forgotten a young man for you; Cis Whigham is coming in, but he said he should be late. He's doing a turn at a private party in Preston Park. It was a fifteen-pound touch, so he couldn't well give it up. . . . Hullo! there you are at last!" The comedian was already at the door. "Come in. You remember Miss Carthew? Well, perhaps you're right, if you never knew her, you couldn't well remember her. But you won't forget her in a hurry, I'll bet that. Now then, waiter, look alive; open those bottles, pass the wine round, let some one else do the kickshaws."

Sally Snape, sitting at the right hand of her host, silent and bewildered, lost herself in trying to follow the brilliancy of this gay party. For, as the wine unloosed their slack tongues, everybody began to talk at once. There were jokes she could not follow, allusions she could not

understand, a general *camaraderie*, and familiarity to which she had no clue. Cis Whigham whistled for the waiter when he wanted anything, and gave his orders in voices imitative of Irving, Tree, and Charlie Hawtrey. Every one in the room turned round to look at the party; Joe Aarons' table was certainly the centre of attraction.

Lord Kidderminster, solitary at his corner table, thought they were making rather too much noise. He knew Joe well enough, and, of course, everybody knew the Heseltines and Cis Whigham. But still he could not place that quiet red-headed girl who sat at Joe's right hand; and this worried him. He prided himself on his memory for girls. He would have gone up to speak to Joe, and thus set his mind at rest, but, as the dinner went on, the party grew a little too noisy and conspicuous. If it had not been the dead season, and the hotel comparatively empty, the management might have interfered. But, as things were, the few visitors enjoyed the free entertainment.

Joe Aarons could not make Sally talk; he had a professional capacity for drawing people out, but here he met with a failure. She was unlike the type he knew, the gay or bashful, impudent or pseudo-modest, coryphées who pursued him with cajolery or pleading in all his business hours. Also she had none of the pride of the "stars" with whom he had to deal sometimes. But she had liked the sea! He tried to talk sentiment to her when the wine had warmed him. But there, too, he was little more successful.

"A pretty girl like you didn't ought to be alone down here," he began.

"Miss Carthew came with me. We've only been here since yesterday. I don't feel a bit lonely."

"I bet you've never been lonely in your life, eh?"

Sally never had, until she had been by the sea. Ever

since this morning she had felt lonely and small and insignificant. She was giddy with her mingled emotions, tongue-tied and inexpressive in this novel atmosphere. She knew nothing of what they were talking. It was her first party, her first taste of social life; her ignorance descended like a mist upon her, and dimly, as if at a great distance, the lights and the talk, the food and the gaiety, reached her understanding.

"You are all so clever," she said pathetically to Joe. "I want to listen, not to talk."

"You and me must have a turn one day quiet. What do you say to a drive, now? But don't you talk if you haven't a mind to. I see it's all new to you."

He patted her knee soothingly with his podgy hand, and plied her with wine. Later on, when the hilarity grew a little beyond the bounds of the table d'hôte room, the manager offered them the use of a sitting-room with a piano in it. There were two or three gentlemen staying in the hotel who would like to join their party, he said.

"Let 'em all come," said the genial Joe. And there was more wine brought in, and singing, and, after that, dancing. Joe Aarons put his arm round silent Sally and said —

"Come along, Miss Snape, you have a round with me." But she answered she couldn't dance, and didn't want to dance; she wanted to be left alone. It was all growing stranger and stranger, and her head ached.

"Oh! now don't be unsociable, give us a dance."

She was surrounded. If she would not dance with Joe, would she dance with Cis, or with Mr. Blount here, or with Captain Carstairs? No, she wouldn't dance with none of them. Sulky Sally of the gutter came back, and her speech with it. Mrs. Heseltine was playing a lively tune on the piano, and Cis careered around by himself in solemn mockery whilst they were entreating her.

"I won't dance with none of yer. . . ." But suddenly the wine and the music met within her.

"I'll dance by myself," she said. "Get along now, give me room."

It was a new Sally, or an old one revived. She gathered up the skirt of that old merino; the blue rep petticoat beneath was quite short, the black stockings and neat shoes showed the slenderest of ankles.

"Give us a reel," she cried out to Dot, as if the great Mrs. Heseltine had been an organ-grinder. And Dot actually struck up a lively tune as she was bid; she fell easily into the spirit of it, so did Cis, so presently did many of the others. It was a gay, spirited Scotch reel she played. Cis was not only a humorist on the stage; he cried "hech!" and crooked his elbow, and "hech!" and raised his leg. He was a veritable Scotsman at his national dance. Soon Sally was dancing with him, right well and in time, with her black merino drawn high over her short petticoat. Face to face with him she danced her steps, linking arms with him, then back to back. Perhaps they were not all quite sober, perhaps she herself had drunk a little more than her head could stand. But there was nothing ungraceful or immodest in her movements, they were full of music and poetry. Dot's fingers moved quicker and quicker. One couple after another got exhausted and flung themselves down. Sally and Cis had the floor to themselves.

After that dance, restraint became a thing of the past. Sally danced again and again — waltzes, polkas, galops.

"Where did you learn 'em?" asked Joe.

"Dancin' to the organ," she said, out of breath. "In our court, when I was a kid."

"And to think of you trimmin' hats!" he ejaculated admiringly.

But that was to himself, after he had seen Sally dance the cake-walk. It was then he made a resolution.

Joe Aarons was always the man to act warily when business was on the *tapis*. He had watched Sally dancing; it was untutored dancing, and tutoring might spoil it.

"Think she'd be any use to you?" he asked Tom Heseltine. But the free drinks had been too much for Tom.

"With legs like that she'd be of use to any one," he said incoherently. "Where did you pick her up?"

Joe had not picked her up yet. As he put it to himself, he "didn't know the market." For when at length the party was over, and he and Cis walked home with the girls, Sally had grown quite silent and cold again. He tried to put his arm round her waist, and she pushed him away.

"Well! you're going to give me a good night kiss, anyway," he pressed. She bolted away from him then right along Ship Street Gardens. He was too fat to toil after her. She had disappeared into the obscurity of the dingy house of the dingy side street by the time Cis, Elfrida, and Joe had reached the door-step. Elfrida wanted a little help; she was rather hysterical, talking, laughing, and crying at once. She had had a splendid evening. Joe Aarons wouldn't forget her again, her hat-shop days were over; she had been through bad times, but they were all over now. Cis would be a friend to her, Joe would be a friend to her, Mr. Blount said he would be a friend to her! She would have kissed everybody, but there were only Cis and Joe here, so she kissed them. It was only after a good many "my dears," and sympathetic responses, that the tired men were able to get rid of her at last, gently pushing her through the door, Cis going with her as far as the chair in the hall.

"You're all right now?" he asked.

"I'm all ri' now. You're a good pal."

"Squiffy?" said Joe to Cis when they got into the street again.

"Goin' that way," Cis answered gaily; "poor little girl!"

"Regular little wrong 'un," Joe said contemptuously. "You keep out of that, my boy; she has no talent and no grit. What do you think of the other?"

"Makes me think of Tuesdays. My governor kept a cook-shop in the City Road. Tuesday was boiled beef and carrot day. I seem to smell 'em when I look at her; every one to their taste, I don't cotton to red hair, myself!"

CHAPTER VII

IF Sally and Elfrida woke each with a headache next morning, it was no reflection upon the champagne at the Majestic. Elfrida may have had a little more than she could stand. As for Sally, it was neither the quantity nor the quality that had affected her, it was the novelty of the whole experience.

First she had been shy, nervous, inwardly excited. Then the excitement had flamed up; she had danced, she had talked . . . she tried to remember what she had said.

But the cool of the evening had suddenly calmed and quieted her when they came out of the Majestic in the small hours. She had glanced only once at the sea; it heaved under the silver moon. She dared not look at it again, but the consciousness of it filled her, and she had walked silently by Joe Aarons, her pulses beating wildly. What a life it must be out there, beyond. Her heart swelled with the thought, and her eyes filled. She had had some slight training in religion, but only since she had seen the sea had the dim possibility come to her that there might be a God. She turned her eyes away, she was not fit for it.

It was "life" she had been seeing that evening, the "life" of which Elfrida often spoke, dilating on its joys. Elfrida had tried to make Sally envious of it, but gaiety is not the natural note of the English poor. Sally had listened with unheeding ears. But now she knew that she had been in the very midst of this gay life, and that she had become

intoxicated with it. People had wanted to talk to her, had seen no difference between her and themselves. Not her clothes, the things she said, nor the paucity of her knowledge, had been against her. Mr. Aarons had been kind, all through the dinner and all through the evening he had been kind. She had run away when he had wanted to kiss her "good night." She was always like that, she hated to be touched. But the most vivid of her memories about him this morning was that he had told her she was fit for better things than serving in a hat shop, that she ought to wear fine clothes, and jewellery, that she had only to be properly seen to be admired.

Lying in bed with her head aching, and all the memories of the day and the evening confusing her thoughts, she wondered what Mr. Perry would say if he knew, what he would have thought if he had seen her dancing, and how he would have liked her in Elfrida's white blouse. Presently she began to cry. She would have to put on that hateful black merino again. And if she wore the hat with the gardenias to-day there would be nothing different for Sundays. What was the good of working and working, and then, in your ten days' holiday, having nothing to wear? She wished she'd never come to Brighton.

But the morning was not very long spent, the girls had already almost recovered themselves, under the influence of two large cups of tea and a plate of bread and butter, when a letter arrived from Mr. Aarons, and changed the face of the day. He had hired a brake, and was going to drive over to Eastbourne at once. Would the young ladies join? They were all going to lunch at the Ocean Hotel.

"Oh, Elfrida," pleaded Sally, "lend me something to wear, anything so that they don't see me again in my black merino. You know I'd do the same for you."

"Good heavens! I haven't got a rag to my back. You're welcome to anything of mine, but I'd as soon wear your black merino as anything. You should have seen me when I was with Harry. He gave twenty pounds for a serge dress for me. And I'd silks for evenings, and a pink opera coat. . . ."

"I wish I'd got a friend like that."

Elfrida gave her a look, and a short laugh. Elfrida knew well enough that Sally had not crossed the t's nor dotted the i's of the half-confidences that had been given her. Sally, of the slums, knew vice and virtue, the line of demarcation between the two had been sharply defined in Angel Court. But she knew nothing of expediency. The higher she mounted the fainter that line of demarcation was to grow, but nothing had blurred it as yet. She went through Elfrida's wardrobe with her. It had all come down in one box, and Mr. Perry might have cast every single garment contemptuously aside, but to Sally it was very enviable.

Elfrida had expressed herself as willing to lend Sally anything or everything she wanted. But, as garment after garment was taken out, held up, and discussed, it seemed that there were limitations to her generosity. That dark blue serge, for instance, she thought of wearing herself. The dress with the gilt buttons was the very identical dress Harry had given twenty pounds for; she did not think she could bear to see it on any one else. The red serge skirt, yes, Sally could have her red serge, and a muslin blouse; she had another muslin blouse somewhere. But Sally could not forget Mr. Perry's teaching. She acquired with difficulty, but she seldom forgot. He had told her never to wear red. He would not even allow her to try on anything that had red in it, not a ribbon nor a feather nor a rose.

"Pink, child, you might wear; a certain shade of pink goes quite well with red hair, but red . . . oh, dear, take it away, Miss Baines."

His words came back to her when Elfrida made her generous offer, and she shook her head sadly.

In the end she put on her Sunday things, tulle bow, crinoline hat, and gardenias. And when the girls walked to the Majestic according to instructions, to join the coach, it was the slim figure in black merino, and not the fair and fluffy Elfrida, in the light blue cotton that had proved her final choice, who had the glances and approval of the men lounging in the portico of that vulgar hostelry, waiting to see Joe Aarons' party go out.

Lord Kidderminster's motor was in attendance to take him back to town. Already the chauffeur had set the engine in motion, and it was piff-piffing its noise and smell. But Kiddie himself, a rose in his light coat, a cigarette between his lips, was among the loungers in the portico.

"You wait here, and I'll go in and see if they are ready," said Elfrida.

Sally was alone, and standing by his side.

"You don't remember me?" said Kiddie, in a low voice, without raising his hat, though he couldn't, for the life of him, remember where he had seen her. But he thought, considering the party to which she was attached, there was no harm in trying to find out.

"Oh, indeed I do, my lord," she answered, flushing suddenly at being spoken to by him. "Indeed, indeed I do. And how good you were." She was quite earnest, she could not bear the imputation of ingratitude that she read into his words.

Kiddie felt an odd little thrill of emotion. Had he been good to this pretty girl? Very pretty Sally looked in the sunlight, with the flush his words evoked, showing sweet

pink under the transparent pallor. Her eyes, raised to him, were darker than usual, and full of feeling:

"I owe it all to you. . . ."

She was so full of it all, this new strange life of hers, the great width and space of it about her, the breaking of the waves on the stones in the distance, the drive she was going to have, the kindness of everybody. . . . "I could never forget," she said earnestly — "never!"

All the idlers on the portico were looking at these two; and Lord Kidderminster was embarrassed.

"I'd like to be a lot kinder," was what he said. But the tone belied the words, for it was not flippant. He had meant to be flippant, and not very respectful, but neither his voice nor manner met the words.

"Would you?" she said wonderingly, her aquamarine eyes meeting his inquiringly. Of course, there had flashed into her mind Elfrida's friend, and the fine clothes he had given her. She wanted fine clothes, oh, so badly, so very badly. What other kindness could any one show her?

At that moment Joe Aarons appeared in a very loose driving coat, and very yellow gloves. His bald head was hidden under a sporting bowler, worn very rakishly. His body-guard looked more theatrical here than they would have done on any stage. There were women with dyed hair, loud voices, and light clothes; men, mean-looking and raddled, with the appearance of members of cock and hen clubs, their ties and gloves and socks, flamboyant, and incongruous with their dissipated eyes, and weak-kneed walk.

Joe was very loud and very hearty.

"Here she is, here's Miss Snape. Mornin', your lordship. Comin' our way? We're off to Eastbourne for a trip. Nice day."

Lord Kidderminster was in two moods, half a dozen

moods, in fact. Joe would introduce him, if he wanted an introduction. Joe would tell him where she had been "on," if she had been on. He could not detach her from the frame in which she was set. But something about her eyes made an appeal to him that strangled speech. Her wonderful smile acknowledged Joe's greeting. All was bustle and confusion. Lord Kidderminster exchanged no further words with Sally. He saw she was the objective of Joe's most overwhelming attentions. It was she who was to have the front seat of the coach, beside the host. It was for her a rug was borrowed, a sunshade opened. Finally, with a flourish from the horn, and a feeble whoop and hooroo from the passengers, for even Cis was not at his gayest so early in the morning, the horses started. Kiddie's last sight of Sally was her face upturned to Joe's just as it had been to his own. He pictured the iridescent green of her eyes seeking Joe's bulging black ones.

Lord Kidderminster drove back to town at the rate of forty miles an hour, and was stopped twice by the police. He had, therefore, an apparent excuse for being boorish and irritable that evening. It was his last night in town; to-morrow he was going home, to gladden the tired, loving mother's-eyes that looked out of the plain face of the Marchioness of Fortive.

Sally enjoyed her drive. To be borne behind four horses along the Parade, with the distant sea tumbling dishevelled white-topped waves over and over for her delectation, now in sunlight, now in shadow, while the wind, warm and sea-laden, lifted her hair, and flushed her cheeks, was an exhilaration beyond words or coherent thought. She was glad she had been able to tell Lord Kidderminster how grateful she was to him; they were glad, grateful eyes that she raised also to Joe, when he asked her if she was comfortable, if she was enjoying herself.

She did not want to talk; but Joe Aarons could never be silent. He talked to her, to the driver, to the people behind. He had the air of possessing, not only the coach and the horses and the driver, but the sea and the hills, and coast-line, even the sun and the warm wind. He drew attention to them in his self-glorification:

"Haven't I picked out a fine day for you? What do you think of this, boys, eh? This is the sort of wind I go for, just enough and not too much. And not a glaring sun, nor one that takes the skin off yer nose. . . ."

He had arranged it all, he was the impresario of the elements.

Sally was not proving herself, after all, as congenial a companion as he had hoped. Her cake-walk last night had, so far, been the only lively thing about her. He began to make love to her. It was rather a coarse and unlovely article, this love that he suggested. But he had always found it acceptable. He was out for a day's enjoyment, and she was a pretty "gal." She wanted "rousin'," that was all. She was one of the quiet ones, deeper, perhaps, for that.

"Well, have you been thinking over what I said to you last night?"

She turned her head round, and the light of the sea was in her eyes.

"What you said last night?" she repeated vaguely.

"About the hat-shop."

"You thought I could do better."

"If you had a friend to back you."

She flushed.

"I wish I had a friend." She was thinking of Elfrida.

"So you have, my dear, so you have." He put his coarse hand on her knee, under the rug. And her flush deepened, she hated to be touched. "I'll be a friend to

you, my dear, you and me'll be much better friends. Perhaps I can't do as much for you as some, but I can give you a start."

"You're very kind."

"I like being kind to you." He gave the knee a pinch. Sally pushed his hand away; she could not help it, she hated it there.

"You mustn't be stand-offish with me," he edged closer to her, but she edged away.

"It's awful hot," she said.

"Awfully. Yes, it's awfully hot. Now, if we were alone, and none of this lot behind, you'd give me a kiss, wouldn't you? You ran away last night; but you like me better in the daytime, eh?"

She liked him well enough, but she hated kissing, and told him so quite simply. Presently, because the position, and the glory of the day, took her out of herself a little, she became more confidential.

"I've always hated it," she confided to him. "Johnny Doone was the first who wanted to kiss me, and many times I've smacked his face for him. I like Johnny, but I didn't want him about me. And then, there was the tailor where I worked. His wife walked into him about it, and into me too, though I don't see how I was to have helped it. And loafers in the street, and Luke Cullen, and everybody. I can't think why they can't leave a girl alone. I hate such ways. Now, Mr. Perry, he . . . do you know Mr. Perry?"

"I can't say I do, my dear," said Joe, who was getting a little bewildered. "And did he want to kiss you?"

"No; he never so much as came nigh me, except in business."

"He is in Brook Street? Foreman there?"

"I think he is partner; the girls say so."

"And he is the only man you have ever met who hasn't tried to kiss you. Well, my dear, I can't help it, but I think he's got very bad taste."

"He has got beautiful taste," she said gravely. "If he says a thing is right, why, it *is* right. Colours you'd never think would go together. . . ."

"Does he want to marry you?"

"Marry me! Me marry Mr. Perry!" The flush in her cheek was scarlet this time. "No more than if I was the dirt under his feet."

"Then why drag him in?"

She didn't know, only that she had been thinking of him, and wishing that he could see her there, driving in a coach and four. And she kept on thinking of him whilst Joe Aarons talked. For Joe talked of dress and jewellery and dinners at the Carlton, suppers at the Savoy. He talked as some cheap Mephistopheles might have discoursed. They were neither subtle, nor veiled, these temptations he spread before her eager eyes and awakening greed. Taken altogether it amounted to something like this:

"You're a very pretty girl, and the world belongs to pretty girls. It is for them the clothes and the jewellery, the dinners, and suppers are prepared. A man don't want things for himself, or by himself; he wants to give 'em away, he wants to spend his money, with a pretty girl to help him. I'm not a very young man myself, I'm forty, and I've got a missus, and kids — but I've got an eye for a pretty girl. You can get almost anything you like out of me. I'm as weak as water when I take a fancy. How would you like a bracelet now, a bangle . . . ?"

Sally had a certain sense of exhilarated uneasiness. She felt as a child feels who is contemplating mischief, wanting the fun of it, guessing there was a possible penalty attached, but putting that out of her mind. She would

evade the penalty. One could always get out of things; she could take care of herself, she had always been able to do so.

Of course, she would like to have a bracelet, she longed to have a bracelet. She had possessed no jewellery except hairpins and combs. She gave one-and-nine each for two turquoise hairpins, and four-and-eleven for the comb, the day she went to Epping. But Miss Rugeley had advised her not to wear them when she went to Brook Street. So she had given them to the maid at Miss Rugeley's. She told Joe about Ursula and the dress she had given her.

"It's the one I've got on," she said rather plaintively, "it's the only one I've got."

"You shall buy yourself another," Joe promised her. His hand was on her knee again, and he was closer to her than she liked. "I'll tell you what I'll do. You get rid of Carthew, and we'll have a little dinner together tonight, all by ourselves. Then we'll talk things over, and see what's to be done. You be a good girl"—he gave her knee another pinch; he was growing more amorous, and the feel of her slender shoulder, shrinking from him, warmed his blood—"and you won't find Joe Aarons mean. I'm not free; I wouldn't like the missus to know of any goings-on. But you trust yourself to me, and I'll take care of you. You want a friend, and I'll be a good one to you."

The Ocean at Eastbourne is a much more decorous caravanserie than the Majestic at Brighton. A heavy and genteel snobbishness dominates the large, ill-furnished hall, with its uncomfortable basket chairs, its rickety wicker tables. Materfamilias, in cap and shawl, sits there all day long with her fancy work, scenting scandals, sniffing the air for them hungrily. Dull fathers of duller families

lounge restlessly, waiting for the "Times," dreading the inevitable music. A few provincial old maids sit, each with her separate copy of Marie Corelli's latest romance. Gauche girls in tennis costumes track gaucher men with tennis rackets. But there is no sound of gaiety or laughter; decorum is the note, the whole hall dull and grey with the brooding shadow of it.

The alighting of Joe Aarons and his party produced no apparent stir on the surface. The lunch hour was just over, and the weight of a lethargic digestion chained the stout English men and women to their basket chairs, and their saddle-back chairs. Gouty men with sticks raised rheumy eyes as the party passed through the hall; the dyed heads of the women were typical to them of all they had lost.

The scandal-loving matrons were less interested; they felt that here was little provender for them. It had been nosed over, and become stale; the very word "theatrical" included the worst they would say or suggest.

Notwithstanding the mute disapproval of the occupants of the hall, Joe dominated the place until he had roused the competent hall-porter into disposing of him suitably.

The ladies were led to take off their wraps in the big marble cloak-room, the gentlemen found accommodation for their coats and rugs. Luncheon had been ordered by telephone. A big table down the middle of the restaurant seated them all comfortably. The head-waiter, a tall and gentlemanly person, with the manners of the secretary of a golf club, gave personal attention to their insistent needs. Three or four German-Swiss novices, with napkins over their arms, blundered about, perspiring furiously, and trying to understand what was said to them.

But the terrible respectability of the place subdued even

Cis Whigham, and they all ate and drank in comparative silence. The cold grip of it was still upon them when they had finished. They tried the hall for smoking, but already there were the scraping of violin strings and the shuffling of chairs. The band was beginning, and, sipping their extraordinary coffee to the sound, the Eastbourne visitors strained their imaginations to consider the scene continental!

"Oh, Lord, this place gives me the hump," said Cis. "Get us out of it, Joe, there's a good fellow. You ordered the coach back at six. What on earth are we going to do till then? I can't stand these cats, or that caterwauling. Find out if there's anything to be done."

The hall-porter had tact, understanding, sympathy. The head-waiter might have suggested the Devonshire Park, a walk to Beachy Head, the band on the esplanade. But the hall-porter's judgment was unerring.

"There's an entertainment on the pier, sir. A London company, very good I hear it is, very good indeed."

"Send up and book me two rows. Say it's for Joe Aarons, Joe Aarons of Maiden Lane." He was almost pompous about it; at least it must be said for him that he was proud of his name and his calling.

Sally Snape found herself walking down the Eastbourne Parade with yellow-haired Elfrida in vivid blue, yellow-haired Minnie Mason in her egregious frock, Dot Heseltine, and the rest of the bizarre group.

That was how they appeared to Mary and Alf and Mr. Peastone, who were sitting together in the penny seats that edged the promenade, feeling ineffably genteel. They had been at Eastbourne three days, and had imbibed already something of the impeccable virtue and stodgy respectability that broods under the terrible statue of the last Duke of Devonshire, the patron saint of Eastbourne. He sits in

his stone chair at the bottom of Hartington Place and gazes with complacent inherent granite stupidity on the non-conformist conscience at play.

Mary and Alf and Mr. Peastone were staying at a boarding house. Alf's sister was there too, and she shared a room with Mary, which made confidences about Alf easy, and reduced the price to twenty-five shillings, with board. The same arrangement held good with Mr. Peastone and Alf. In the evenings, at the boarding house, there was music, sometimes there were recitations, and on Saturdays they danced. Charlie Peastone was a great success there; he danced, he sang, he told stories, he chaffed the girls and the landlady, always decorously, of course. Over and over again Mary and Alf discussed what a lot Sally had missed in not being with them. Alf's sister could not be said to have adequately taken Sally's place; for, poor girl, she had a port wine mark all down one side of her disfigured face, and, though she was good at her needle, and earned her living by it, her misfortune was ever present with her; and she was the reverse of lively.

"But Sally and him would have suited, she wanted rousing, and there never was such company. . . . Lor! if that isn't Sally herself!"

They looked, and looked again, Alf less long or hard than the others, because he never could keep his eyes very long from his fair and gentle Mary. Mary said: "Well I never!" twice. Charlie Peastone changed colour, and was actually silent for a moment. Then he told them:

"That's Minnie Mason with her; she is at the Hilarity, doing a turn with song and breakdown:

> I'm an utter girl, a splutter girl,
> I'm a hoo-blooming-ray and gutter girl.

The fat woman is Dot Heseltine, it's a theatrical lot."

"I can't think what Sally is doing with them."

"Oh, don't mind me," said Charlie, with a faint attempt at hilarity, trying to get his spirits back.

> **And I'll ask you to believe**
> **That I carry on my sleeve**
> **The sign of a broken heart,"**

he sang under his breath.

"It's a great pity."

"And pity 'tis, 'tis true."

"Why don't you go after her?" said practical Mary. "Perhaps she don't know what she's doing. It's just as like as not she don't know who they are. It's that girl she rooms with. I never did think much of her, when Sally talked about the things she had, the clothes and money. Alf, you go with him, go up and speak to her. You might ask her to tea."

Alf got up obediently, but Charlie waved him back grandiloquently. "Alone I did it," he quoted, and started off in pursuit.

Half-hearted all through in his dealings with Sally Snape, too selfish seriously to contemplate matrimony with a factory girl, too thin-blooded to dream of a lighter connection, he had yet been impressed by the girl as, in his shallow jocund life, he had never been before. No one else had interested him since he met Sally, the impudent barmaids had all lost their savour. He posed as one who had had a disappointment. He made a great deal of Sally's unforgiveableness over her accident, and allowed Mary and Alf to condole with him. But it was only now, when he saw her, in what seemed to him a dangerous surrounding and atmosphere, that she gripped him as the one thing desirable, the one thing necessary. The blood that was suffusing his face, when his hurried steps

brought him up beside her, came from the heart; it was thick and hot, the first human pumping.

"Good day, Miss Snape."

Sally turned to him quickly, anybody was preferable to the people she was with:

"Oh! are Mary and Alf with you? I *should* like to see Mary." She stopped short, and detached herself from her party.

"Mary is just two minutes away, on the seat beyond. If I might be honoured by being your escort?"

"Wait a minute."

Sally ran on, breathlessly. "Elfrida, Miss Mason, I'm not coming with you. Tell Mr. Aarons, will you, that I've met some old friends, and I don't care about the pier. I'll meet you all at the hotel when the brake starts."

"Old friends!" said Minnie, and winked. Charlie caught the wink and returned it, as he stood waiting for Sally; he didn't mind what they thought. He was rather gratified if they thought it was for him she was giving up the pier and their society.

He took her back to Mary, and Mary kissed her, Alf shook hands with her, Charlie made humorous speeches. They asked her questions, and, without waiting for the answers, breathlessly told her of the delights of Medina House and its gaiety. They pitied her for being at Brighton instead of Eastbourne. They introduced her to Alf's sister, and Mary said she was sure the two would be friends, because they were both in the same business. But as Alf's sister made dresses for servants, at four shillings and sixpence, including lining, and Sally was in Brook Street under Mr. Perry, the mutual occupation proved a mere blind alley.

Sally had been glad to leave her party for a little. Elfrida and Minnie Mason had not been pleased that she

should have the box-seat and all Mr. Aarons' attentions; they said one or two spiteful things, against which Sally had no defence. Her longing for pretty clothes, growing and always growing since she had been in Brook Street, gnawed and ached within her, like hunger. She thought she would do anything to be prettily dressed, anything to drive away the memory of the evening when Mr. Perry's eyes had fallen upon her black merino, and he had not asked her to come up to his rooms.

She thought she would do anything, but her thoughts led her no distance. She was only an embodied "*I want*"; she had no thought of giving, only of receiving. A great greed was fastening upon her. Joe's words had filled her with vague hopes. The future was nebulous. She had no spirit for Minnie Mason and Elfrida Carthew, and their little spiteful speeches remained unanswered. But she had accelerated heart-beats and inner excitement. She was glad to leave it all for a time, all this prospect and change that was before her, and go back to Mary. She had been happy at the factory, before she had known any better. And the romance of Mary and Alfred drew her unresistingly.

She and Mary had a long talk that afternoon, a long, intimate talk. Mary heard all about Elfrida, and her clothes, the dance at the Majestic, and Mr. Aarons' suggestions; she made no hesitation about those dotted i's and crossed t's.

"You're not one to go wrong willingly, I know," she said, "but you might be took advantage of. I don't like that set you're with, and Alf don't like them. Don't you trust yourself alone with that Mr. Aarons." For Mary heard about the promised drive and bracelets. "He's not meaning anything for nothing, you mark my words."

"I want things so," poor Sally said.

"Dresses and jewellery and things?"

"Everything, everything other folks has got."

"I can't think what's come to you. You wasn't like this before you left the factory."

"No."

She hung her head. It was true, she had been happy and contented there. It was circumstances that moved her, not the reverse; she was ever the one still thing in the maelstrom, turning with it, not struggling. Mary had her inspiration:

"Come back to us," she said; "you'll be happier there, and safer. Is there no chance between you and Mr. Peastone?"

"It always seems to me it was his joking broke my leg, and gave me those hours and hours of pain; I thought that all the time, I can't get over it."

"It's very wrong, I'm sure no one could have been more sorry than him."

"And the doctors pulling it about, and always making it worse, putting it in splints, taking 'em off again, making me stand on it, and the aching and shoots. . . . that was all him," said Sally, out of breath and pale with the mere memory of her physical discomforts. She was so healthy, so unused to pain or illness, her resentment of it was deep-seated, past argument.

"I should have liked you to be happy, like me and Alf," Mary said wistfully.

Her own happiness had been like food and drink to her, she was so content and fed and satisfied that she wanted to diffuse what was left, to feed the world. And Sally had been with her when she first met Alf, almost, she might say, she owed the introduction to her. This pale little clerk, idealistic and anæmic, carried with him a great gift. His interests and outlook may have been narrow, but beneath that narrow surface-chink lay

a broadening depth of sympathy. Mary Murray had bathed in it and become whole. It was there, too, for Sally. Alf talked to her when Mary had done talking. It wasn't easy to be pretty, and have the men after you, and say "no" to everything. He saw all the temptations the world offered her, rich gew-gaws spread before her longing eyes. But there was only one way of happiness; to keep in one's own station, love one another, and be content with what one had.

Sally rejected, and could not but reject, the creed. She was as a child who cannot reason, but wants and always wants. She had a thousand ungratified desires, and all of them were awake and gnawing at her. She saw the happiness and content of Mary and Alfred in their mutual love and mutual admiration, she even saw the charm of the prospective semi-detached villa with the red geraniums. But, if she had had all that, she would still be athirst.

Charlie walked back with her to the Ocean Hotel. He didn't exactly want to tie himself down; and, unlike Alfred Stevens, he had nothing saved. He spent his salary as soon as he got it, or before, much of it on ties and waistcoats, cheap jewellery and dissipation.

"You ought to come over here for a bit. I don't care about Brighton myself, it's overdone, no style about it. It used to be all right, but it's gone down, while Eastbourne has gone up. You know the ticket — one down, t'other come up. I say, Miss Snape, you might give a fellow a bit of encouragement. You know I really am gone on you."

"What's the good?"

"What's the good? I like that. What's the good of anything, if it comes to that? You're not a girl to be without a chap to take her out. Now, why shouldn't I be that

chap? I'm not vain, but I think I know the ropes. I've learnt a thing or two about life. I can get tickets for half the theatres in London. You're the sort of girl a fellow likes to be seen about with."

There was nothing of guile about Sally, now, or at any time. She did not dislike Charlie Peastone as much this afternoon as she had done whilst in the hospital. And, of course, she knew that most girls go out with some fellow or another. She liked the theatre, and any time she might meet Mr. Perry there again.

"I don't think I should like always going out with the same fellow," she objected.

He looked at her sharply, but there was not a trace of coquetry about her; she looked very young, and surprisingly fair in the red light of the setting sun.

"If we was to be engaged?" he said slowly. It was a big step to take, "walking out" was not like being engaged. He knew the fickleness of his own affections, and, ever haunted by a possible breach of promise case, had been careful hitherto in making his proposals merely tentative. Sally was different. All he knew, or was ever to know, of life's best possibilities throbbed in him now. It was unselfishness, his first gleam of it. He would actually tie himself up to please her.

"I suppose a man must settle down sometime." He was twenty-four. "If what you're thinking of is that you've heard I've gone the pace a bit, been with one girl one Sunday, and another the next, you needn't think of that any more." He put his arm into hers. "Is it a bargain?" She walked a few paces with him, trying to think. Then his mere proximity irritated her, and her face flamed:

"I can't abide men, and that's the fact," she broke out, shoving his arm away, moving quickly. "Mary likes

Alf dawdling about her, looking at her. I couldn't be like that with any fellow. I am as fond of my freedom as you."

"I'd give it up for you."

"I wouldn't; that's flat. Let's cross over; isn't that the brake? Yes, I'm sure it is; don't come any further. I can get across by myself, and — and — good-bye."

"Not so fast."

He seized her arm again. Her hair had caught the sunset, and he was all entangled in it. "I can't let you go. I'll be anything you like. You shall be as free as free. But tell me when I can see you again. I must see you. I don't believe I can get on without you. Now, Sally, don't be hard. I'm in earnest at last; you're the only girl in the world for me. Say you'll have me."

"They're all waiting for me." She could see them mounting on the brake, she wanted to get away from Charlie, she had not an atom of feeling for him.

"Say you'll see me again."

"I'll think about it when I get to London."

"The very first Sunday?"

"Oh, let me go, Mr. Peastone."

"Not until you promise."

"All right then, the first Sunday."

"You do rather like me?"

"Not if I've got to walk back to Brighton."

"They'll wait for you. Don't let me go like this, give me a kiss. Say you're glad we've made it out together."

"Anybody can see us. Do let me go."

"Just one."

She wanted to get away; she bent her head, and let him touch her cheek. It was cool and sweet. He was outside himself, and momentarily felt the humility of a lover.

"I'm not good enough for you."

The phrase recurred to her when again she was beside Joe Aarons on the box-seat of the four-in-hand. She took what grown-up people say literally, as children do. After Joe's speeches of the morning, which came back to her now, she thought it was quite true, Charlie Peastone was not good enough for her. His wages couldn't be more than Alf's, and Alf's were not enough to allow him to marry Mary. And Mary wanted so little; she was satisfied with her cotton frock, with nothing.

"A nice little dinner, my dear," Joe's voice, which had been going all the time, now reached her inner ear. "Just our two selves, and we'll talk things over. A little flat, perhaps; it might run some day to a little flat in Victoria, there's no knowing. Joe Aarons is not the man to let you down. We'll see about what you can do; a girl likes a bit of independence. You haven't got bitten with it yet, but it's the boards, my dear, the boards you belong to. Have you ever tried to sing? You'd dance, you know, you'd dance all right if you was taught. I'll get you taught."

She had that prospect, together with the booming sea, grey now, and chill. The red had gone out of the sky, and that, too, was grey. She did not find Joe's proximity so bad now that it was dusky, and she was chilly. She did not resent his warm podgy hand holding hers, nor his arm, and the rug, going round her. But there was no appeal in the small flat in Victoria, nor in the prospect of getting a chance of appearing on the music-hall stage.

When she got home she told Elfrida that Mr. Aarons wanted her to dine with him at the Nicola restaurant.

"Fancy Joe Aarons, old Joe Aarons!" Elfrida wondered, more than once. "Why, he could have almost any one he wanted. He's got a lot of influence, not only at the halls,

but in touring companies, and even in the chorus; there's no knowin' what he might do for you. But it isn't like him. . . ."

"You come along, too."

"Not me. I don't go where I'm not wanted."

CHAPTER VIII

BUT the "little dinner" never came off.

The Joe Aarons of Maida Vale, who was temporarily installed, with his family, in a furnished house in Regency Square, Brighton, was quite a different man from the one that appeared in Maiden Lane, or amongst the coryphées and chorus girls out of whom he made his living. Sally Snape would take clothes and jewellery from him, he had no doubt. No one had a meaner opinion of "theatre women," as he called them generically, than Joe Aarons. If, now and again, he took slight advantage of the privileges his position afforded, that, too, was all in the way of business. It was impossible to have been engaged for twenty-five years in supplying the music-hall, and sometimes the musical-comedy stage, with the particular article each required, without becoming something of an expert in the line. And, like the majority of his race-brethren, Joe Aarons' intelligence and knowledge of his business were above the average. Therefore, he had recognized quickly that Sally Snape was rare of make, and of most attractive colouring, and, whether she had talent or not, was obviously fitted to shine in the profession to which he was an acknowledged intermediary. The exact nature of the profession he regarded synthetically rather than analytically; but conventional morality was not in the list of its qualifications.

Sally's figure had struck him on the Parade. Elfrida Carthew he had passed with perfunctory nod and glance,

but her companion dwelt in his mind; hence all that had followed. Then her dancing, although untutored, had a certain quality of grace, of spontaneity. Joe Aarons had even noted Lord Kidderminster's short colloquy on the steps of the Majestic.

"She's got it," was the sum of his thoughts concerning her. And how best to exploit that particular "it" for the benefit of himself, and, incidentally, of Mrs. Aarons and the four olive branches, had been uppermost in his mind even on that amorous and adventurous coaching journey. There was not a touch of Don Juan in Joe Aarons; pretty girls were his stock-in-trade, that was all, and he was not more particular than most speculative tradesmen as to how he replenished his stock.

Had the "little dinner" come off, Sally would have had her vanity very much flattered, and she might have been persuaded to try her voice in a song, or exhibit her possibilities in a dance; she would have been promised a bracelet or a flat, and might even have been given the money for a dress. But she would have had no real difficulty in protecting her virtue. She would have had far more difficulty in protecting her future income. "A little agreement, my dear," was Joe's most adventurous offer, with a small sum of money on account, and love-making thrown in if the occasion required it, or in order to clinch a bargain.

For Joe Aarons, also like the majority of his brethren, was, out of business hours, the best of husbands, fathers, citizens. Therefore, when he arrived at his temporary Brighton home after that jaunt to Eastbourne, and was met by young Abe at the door, with a scared face all blubbered with tears, telling him:

"Mother's ill; we've been looking and looking for you—oh! father, she's very ill!" all thought of Sally was banished from his mind as if she had never existed.

Now, one saw Joe at his very best. The shock turned him green in the face, and sick in the heart, for his Miriam was the centre of his life. Yet he could find a word of comfort for the child:

"It's all right, old man, come up along with me, and tell me all about it."

He threw an arm about the boy, and the other children, when Abe had broken the bad news, came crying about him. It was easy to see he was a loving father. "Mother" had been taken ill at dinner-time; Rosie saw her turn pale, Sam had tried to get on her lap, but she had sent him running for nurse. Nurse had helped her out of the room, and had never come back. It was at this point of the story that little Rosie's sobs grew uncontrollable, and Joe took her up in his arms and hushed her against his shoulder.

Abe had done all he could. He was eleven years old, always top of his class, the great pride of the house of Aarons. He had been clever and tactful; he had sent Sammy for a doctor, kept the children in order, and watched for father. He had never broken down at all until a moment ago, when he had crept upstairs, listened outside the door, and heard mother moaning. When he said he heard mother moaning, his manliness left him again, and they all cried together, even Joe, though he was already reassured. The tears ran down his cheeks into Rosie's black curls.

"Now you all wait here like good children, while I go up and hear all about it. Sammy will cuddle Rosie and Maudie. Come along, Abey, this isn't like you. Why, you're making me cry now. You come along with me, and wait on the landing whilst I go to mother and see what's wrong. Then I'll bring you word, and you can tell the others. Where's Jane?"

"She's upstairs too," he blubbered.

It was a very limited household. A nurse, a maid-of-all-work, and Mrs. Aarons, between them did the cooking, the cleaning, the mending. Business expenses were high, and the future of the children was always in the parents' minds. They ate and drank well, dressed themselves and their children handsomely, but wasted nothing on the social side of life. Mrs. Aarons had no thought outside Joe and the children; she liked working for them. She was the centre of the household, it revolved around her. Joe knew it. He met so many light women, bad women, frivolous women, that his Miriam seemed to him a pearl beyond price. She had all the virtues, and her pendulous figure and redundant chin counted for nothing against these.

That Mrs. Aarons' illness was of an interesting, rather than a serious, nature was immediately obvious. Mrs. Aarons was a poor arithmetician, and the event which had been happily anticipated for October, when Abe and Sam would have returned to St. Paul's, and the little girls should have been occupied with their nursery governess, had materialized in August. But Joe proved his quality in the next few hours. He was tender and loving to the patient:

"You just think of yourself. I'll see to the children. No, they won't know anything about it, don't you fear, don't you fear. Poor girl! Doctor has found you a nurse, and Jane can get down to her work. Nurse can stay with you until the other comes. The children are just as good as gold now I've told 'em you're not really ill, only the dinner upset you. We put it down to the Dutch cucumber. He's sharp, Abe is, he says you turned pale before you touched it! But it's all right; they believe what I tell 'em. We'll say the doctor brought it. Now, God bless you, old girl, I see you'd rather be alone. I'll be about, ready if I'm wanted. I'm sure you've got a boy for me; it's another boy we want."

He kissed her before he went back to the children; he left her with the knowledge that he was watching, ready to help, taking on himself the burden of the household. What more could a man do? Then he and young Abe sat together when nurse was released for the children, and the podgy hand, which had pinched Sally's knee, in the way of business, was locked more lovingly in young Abe's as the hours grew anxious. The preternatural cleverness of the youngster culminated in an inconceivable sympathy. "She's all right, father, I'm sure she's all right," he urged.

"Yes, yes, my boy, she's all right." This was the eloquence that bound them to each other. But it was morning before the new-born cry assured their speech.

It was no wonder that Sally and the dinner were forgotten.

There was terrible disappointment for Sally, as she sat in her very best clothes, which were in reality Elfrida's very worst, waiting for Mr. Aarons and the new life he was to offer her. When Joe's note came to her telling only that he was detained and must cancel his appointment, she and Elfrida dined at Beech's restaurant at one-and-sixpence per head. Afterwards they went on the pier, where Elfrida found, or made, acquaintances, and became very hilarious and indiscreet. And Sally looked at the sea, and forgot her disappointment. It filled her with wonderment, the sound and the scent of it swept through her mind and heart. It did not satisfy that strange hunger, that strange thirst, the craving "I want," but it soothed the hurt of it, and hushed her.

She had another letter from Joe in the morning. He said his wife was ill, and he could not leave her. He gave Sally his business address, and asked her to call upon him there when she got back to town.

Since the theatre repelled rather than attracted her, it is doubtful whether she would have called on Joe, but for

Elfrida and circumstance. The new circumstance was the continued absence of Mr. Perry from Brook Street, and the consequent tedium and deserted air of the whole establishment. Mr. Perry, so the story went, was detained in Paris by illness; pneumonia was spoken of. Madame Violetta failed to attract or keep her customers, and Miss Baines wandered aimlessly about. The new models did not arrive. Every day and always the same story was told of Mr. Perry's illness. Every day and always came the same reply. Mrs. Mosenstein, or Lady Plenterdrum, the Duchess of Montlily, or Miss Recamier; mondaines, demi-mondaines, judæacracy, all would wait to give their orders until Mr. Perry's return. They one and all implied, there was no use paying Violetta's prices for clothes when there was no Mr. Perry to make them unique.

Sally had little or nothing to do, and idleness never suited her.

"I don't believe that story of Mr. Perry's illness," Elfrida said, "there is something that doesn't ring true about it. This place will bust up if he don't come back. Mr. Jones, the accountant, was looking pretty blue yesterday when I saw him come out of the office with Madame. You mark my words, it isn't as simple as it sounds. We haven't taken an order for a week, and it's October, when we ought to be pretty busy. Tell you what, you ask an afternoon off; they'll have no excuse for saying no, and I'll do the same. We'll look up Joe Aarons; there is no use waiting till you are out of a berth before you look for another. I'd enough of that before I came here."

"But . . ."

"Oh, don't 'but'; of course there are always 'buts.' Mr. Perry may come back; this show may buck up again. Joe Aarons may have forgotten your existence, or he may have remembered it, and have nothing going. I know all

that," she said impatiently. Elfrida was always impatient, uneven in spirits, and inclined to be ill-tempered when her facile affections were temporarily unsought, as had been the case since their return from Brighton.

"But nothing venture, nothing have. So I'm for looking up old Joe. You can come along with me, or leave it alone."

Elfrida wanted Sally to come; she was clever enough to know that she had a greater chance of an audience in that event. And, of course, Sally was persuadable.

Maiden Lane, where Joe Aarons had his office, is the *entresol* to three worlds. In its narrow, characterless causeway, busy journalists, familiar with the shabby loafers who stand in self-imposed idleness at the doors of the garish public-house, hurry past with no eyes for "copy." On the opposite side of the street, a few poor ill-clad worshippers, women with the suffering of life stamped in remorseless lines on their tired faces, humbly and unnoticed, pass into the little Catholic Church, so featureless in its exterior, so full of peace and the beauty of quiet in its shadowy aisles and dimly lit altar. Here is a restfulness ignored by the yellow-headed, ill-kempt, often half-drunken, men and women who are seeking their chance to entertain an ever more critical and exacting public.

The two girls had the primary difficulty of getting through this last unhappy group. Then, ascending some dingy stairs, they reached the outer office, where other girls were waiting. Here their progress was barred by Isaac Hyams, an interested Cerberus, who demanded their names and business, also whether they had an appointment.

Elfrida wrote her name on a piece of paper, with Sally's underneath it. And, greatly to the indignation of those

who had been waiting since the morning, put off from time to time on one excuse or another, the magic door was almost immediately opened to the new arrivals.

Joe's office was not unlike the dirty, ill-furnished outer room. The floor was bare, and there was a Shannon desk, with numberless pigeonholes affixed to the walls. There was a piano under the window, with a fiddle case on the top of it, also a pile of music.

Joe seemed to have grown fatter but no less affectionate:

"So here you are, my dear," he began, not rising from his chair. "Not lost your looks, I see, either of you. And how are things in Brook Street? Nobody much in town yet?"

They had come at a good time; the old favourites were booked until Christmas, and there was room for something new. Sally looked just as remarkable here as she had at Brighton, although somewhat paler. Joe had not forgotten her. He had even sought her out, at her lodgings, when his domestic affairs had given him leisure again, but the girls had already left. Then he had waited quite confidently for them to turn up here. Elfrida Carthew was not the girl to remain away from the boards if she could help it. He felt sure she would bring the other with her, and his faith was quickly justified.

It appeared that Sally had only come with Elfrida because Elfrida had implored it. Sally did not particularly want to go on the stage. She did not think she could dance, at least, not before a lot of people, all of them staring at her! She could sing most things she heard, but she sang only to herself. Sally was diffident of her powers, hesitating about her requirements, satisfied to play second string to Elfrida, who was resplendent in the blue serge with the brass buttons.

"Now you say you can sing anything you hear. Have

you heard Jenny Jones and Minnie Mason in their duet 'We're lassies from the country'?"

Yes, as it happened, Sarah had heard them. She knew the tune and some of the words.

"Well, my dear, let me see what you can do with it. You and Miss Carthew. I'll call in Mr. Hyams; he'll give you the air."

Elfrida, who had had a little training, caught at the chance of exhibiting her powers. Sally was unwilling, and at first almost unpersuadable. She did not mind Mr. Aarons, or Elfrida, but, when Mr. Hyams sat down to the piano she was struck suddenly dumb. She never had sung to a piano, she couldn't sing to a piano, and, as for dancing . . .

Mr. Hyams nevertheless struck up a few chords, swinging half round on the music stool, watching their effect:

"This is the way it goes. . . ."

He hummed a stave or two, looking at Sally, willing her. Elfrida raised her voice to join with his, Joe, husky but tuneful, struck in for the chorus. Mr. Hyams kept the accompaniment low, a mere murmur of chords. Involuntarily Sally's fresh young voice joined in. Elfrida sang her part with spirit, and Sally gained confidence as she went on. The song was catchy, the words were full of innuendo, but that Sally missed. Elfrida supplied it, however, over-supplied it, and the contrast made the thing piquant. It was not sung as Jenny Jones and Minnie Mason had sung it, but it suggested a new combination to Joe; it gave him a sudden idea.

"There, there, that will do." He stopped them after a verse:

"A very pretty voice, my dear, very pretty; they go well together, too. Don't you think so, Ike? Now, look here, I've got an idea for you. You go outside a bit; you can talk things over between yourselves. Miss Carthew, she

wants a chance. Miss Snape, she can't make up her mind what she wants. You talk things over, and me and my friend here will talk things over too."

For Mr. Hyams was not part of the business, as they had imagined, he was a relative out of work. Already Joe had found that his unerring ear, and his musical talent, almost amounting to genius, were invaluable to the office.

Isaac Hyams had been educated at the Jews' Free School, gaining every possible prize and scholastic honour; for three years after he left there he held a clerkship in the office of Messrs. Rothschild. But his musical gift burned within him, and would not be denied. He left the security of the bank, dispensed with the kindly interest of the great philanthropic house, to play third violin in the band of the Grecian. With incredible sacrifice he had paid for lessons in harmony, and in orchestration. At twenty-three years of age he knew he had been wise in his decision; he knew he would rather starve to music than quill-drive to affluence. Grand opera was his goal; *en route* to it he had written half a dozen music-hall songs. Now that he has found his medium, every one has heard of him, but these were the days of his novitiate.

"Well?" said Joe, as soon as they were alone. His tone was interrogative, but triumphant. "What do you think? That's the girl I told you of, you remember, the one I met at Brighton."

Isaac Hyams turned his ungainly person to and fro on the music stool, playing chords with his left hand.

"She'll do," he said laconically.

"Pretty voice?"

"Not much of it."

"Good ear; hits it in the middle?"

"Very; oh, yes, quite."

"And she can move."

"There's less doubt about her figure than about her voice."

"I've been thinking." Joe always spoke slowly when he thought. "Did you notice — did anything strike you — the one so knowing, the other so innocent?"

"Of course, I saw what you did. You'll bring 'em out as 'The Silly Billy Girls,' or 'The Tutti Frutti Girls.' I'll write the song, I've got the song in my mind."

The chords altered; now he faced the piano, played with both hands a little repetitive melody, the refrain in a minor key. "I'll get the words up to-night."

"But she'll have to be taught. . . ."

"Yes; but she's got it in her, the dancing, I mean, not the singing. There's a rhythmic music about her personality. Listen, this is it." He went on playing.

"I saw that down at Brighton — spotted it at once," Joe said triumphantly. As Isaac played he pictured Sally dancing, "but I shall have to engage the other girl with her. I'll get Job Macher to take them both, and give them a good doing over. I suppose I shall have to pay him."

"Haven't they, either of them, got anybody?"

"The little one, Elfrida Carthew, had a friend, Captain Gordon. He paid a premium for her when I got her on at Roma, and she had some lessons then. The other is quite fresh. She's got nobody. I must do it on my own if I do it. It's a speculation."

Isaac Hyams got up. He wore his black hair unconscionably long, his nose was abnormally large, he spoke with an East End accent, and he had the further disadvantage of adenoids. He had forgotten to shave, and possibly to wash, this being Thursday — next day, Friday, of course, he would wash. But there was a sense of power and capacity about him, even now.

"There is no speculation about it; it is a certainty. She wants teaching, of course, but then she'll catch on. She's just got that particular quality which spells success. I'll write this song for her; that ought to make us quits on what I owe you. The other girl is a bit of a let-down, but there is no money in anything but a duet at the moment. Job Macher can have the manuscript to-morrow. He must make her move, make her more flexible. Her two yards of red hair and her eighteen-inch waist must be accentuated. I'll get 'em in the song. But she must move about."

Then he changed the subject. "Sophie Darnley and that Travers girl are waiting. Are you going to see them?"

"Presently. Do 'em good to wait. You're not off, are you?"

"I'd like to get the thing on paper." He was humming it, trying to capture a new musical phrase. "You can do without me, can't you?"

It was not easy to persuade Sally Snape that Brook Street was to be given up, and with it her prospect of meeting Mr. Perry again. Joe talked a great deal, and then he took the girls to lunch at Frascati's. He pointed out this and the other celebrity, and casually mentioned their salaries. The sums seemed incredible to Sally, but were familiar hearsay to Elfrida. Every girl, or party of girls, had some young man with her or them, and groups of young men stood about or lunched together, but they all seemed to know Joe and each other, and all the girls.

Sally got an impression of large black hats, heavy feathered, and of feather boas; she was still too near her Hampstead Heath days not to be envious of the plumage. She liked the good food. Joe told her that May Vernon had been at the halls before Tom Peters found her and gave her her first engagement at the Crystal. Now she

had a hundred a week, and drew every penny of it. Tilly Gunesty was doing a trick turn with the Dalrymple Brothers when she was discovered. And so on. New talk, new worlds, for Sally Snape. It was being made attractive for her to go to Job Macher.

Many people looked at Joe Aarons and his party that day at Frascati's. Elfrida's type was familiar. She had been there before. Harry Gordon's friends all knew her. But Sally was new, unfamiliar. And she was gazing about her with the interested eyes of a child. They were child's eyes, too; it was almost impossible not to recognize that. One or two habitués sauntered over to speak to Joe. Johnny Lyne, for instance, and Tom Chenie. But Joe gave no introduction. Neither the artist nor the derelict aristocrat could be of any use to him in launching his find.

"What are you going to tell them in Brook Street?" was Elfrida's first question to Sally when they had left Joe, after going back with him to the office, signing that little bit of an agreement he suggested, and arranging to go with him to Job Macher on Monday. "You're regularly apprenticed, aren't you? You'll have to invent something."

"Invent!"

"Well, give some excuse for leaving. We shall have to change our room. I wouldn't have signed that agreement if I'd been you. You've bound yourself for two years. He knew better than to ask me."

"But he is going to pay to have me taught dancing and singing, and to give me one pound a week when I'm out of an engagement, and three pounds when I'm in; *and* find my dresses!"

"That's all very well; but if you're any good, he might make thirty pounds a week out of you," she retorted.

Of course, she was jealous, bitterly jealous. Joe had found an opportunity for a private word or two with her. She knew she had to make Sally in love with her prospects. Her own engagement depended upon Sally's signing the agreement for which she now taunted her. Elfrida knew well enough that it was to Sally she owed her own chance of a fresh start. Joe left her under no illusion. It was for the halls, and not for the theatre, they were to be coached.

Like all young ladies in her position, Elfrida held a quite extraordinary view of her own talents. It was only a "chance" she wanted. She had seen no particular merit in Sally's rendering of "We're lassies from the country"; she thought her own much better and truer to the original. Only let her have a chance, and she would show them what she could do. And then . . . The "then," with all its possibilities, that crowded into Elfrida's vain fair head, included a successor to Captain Gordon with an unlimited income and an unappeasable desire to spend it all upon her. She was not more uneven in her temper than Sally had seen her before; in fact, she had intervals of extraordinary good humour in the next week, when Sally was suffering under the difficulties of Miss Baines' cross-examination.

"I don't know what Mr. Perry will say when he hears you are leaving us, or Lady Dorothea Lytham. Why, she paid fifty pounds for you to come here. And now you are sacrificing that."

But encouraged and stimulated by Elfrida, Sally stood firm.

She had her hardest task on Sunday with Charlie Peastone. It was Charlie who had taken her to the music-hall where she had heard the song that had confirmed Joe's opinion of her. Charlie Peastone was in love, in love to

the utmost extent of his limited capacity. He waited for Sally of an evening when she left Brook Street; he had taken her twice to the theatre and once to a music-hall. He was very proud when people turned round to look at her, and he often let slip the opportunity of making a joke. By mutual consent the subject of marriage was left in abeyance. And he understood that Sally objected to any tangible expression of his affection. But she liked going with him to places of amusement, and she wore the gold "Mizpah" ring that he had given her.

The last Sunday of all, the Sunday before she was to begin her public career, he met her by appointment at the Museum tube station, and went on with her to Lancaster Gate. This was their best way to get into Kensington Gardens. The weather was still fine, and the Gardens, in their autumn garb of browns and yellows, were almost as beautiful as in their early green. Sally liked walking by the water, watching the sun on it, and the ducks. She would have liked to stand and feed them, but Charlie said it was "rather low." In his light bowler hat, cut-away coat, black and white check waistcoat, and green tie, Charlie presented a very stylish appearance. It seemed impossible any girl could resist him. He was in very high spirits, too, this morning. Sally had been quite nice to him all the week. And she looked "rippin'" this fine autumn morning, "simply rippin'." On the strength of her certain one pound a week, and probable three pounds, she had bought a new hat, a small one with a green bird in it, and her hair was fluffed up and pinned against it, in the very latest fashion.

"Well, I call that a compliment, trimming your hat to match my tie."

"I hadn't seen your tie," she answered, with the extraordinary directness that characterized her. "I got this

hat at Shoolbred's, because it was like the one I first saw Lady Dorothea in when she came to see me in the hospital. I trimmed it myself."

"What! the hospital?" But he pulled himself up. "Anyway, I don't mind telling you it suits you. Rather different to when I first met you. Not but what I saw then you were different to all others. But there is no doubt being among dressy people has done a lot for you." His ever-growing admiration had to find an excuse, and, certainly Miss Sarah Snape of the Brook Street establishment, a stylish figure in her small toque and spotted veil, was a very different person from the rough-headed factory girl he had found with Luke Cullen in Epping Forest. "You'd hold your own with any of them, and a bit of theirs too. How are things going? Mr. Perry back?" For Charlie, too, had heard of the difference his absence made.

"No."

She wanted to tell Charlie that she had left Brook Street, and had no longer an interest in Mr. Perry's return. But it was easier to watch the ducks. He had no right to interfere, no one had any right to interfere, with her actions. But she "couldn't be walking out with him, and him not know."

"I've left the shop," she said, at length, moving back from the water's edge, not looking at him.

Charlie turned pale; he was habitually pale, but he turned paler.

"Left the shop!" he ejaculated. "Well! I didn't expect you'd have brought it with you." He collected himself to say this, with an attempt at jocularity to cover his astonishment. "Did they give you the sack? Are they turning off the others? What are you going to do?"

He was quite overwhelmed with the news. Sally's style and consequence had so much improved at Brook Street.

Fears knocked at his heart, at first merely selfish, then for her sake. "What are you going to do?" Then a splendid vision dawned, but faded quickly. "I wish I could afford to get married. Why didn't I save like Alf Stevens? I say, wouldn't it be rippin' if we could take a little place?"

"I've got an engagement."

"To me, I know."

"I don't mean that. You know I'm not engaged to you. You can take back your old ring."

"Don't be huffy. I didn't mean it. I know you don't care about me." He looked at her for a denial; he was humbler with Sally than with any girl he had ever wooed. Still it was difficult to believe she did not care about him.

"I'm going on the stage."

"You're not."

"Yes, I am."

He was struck dumb. He sat down on the seat, disturbing two nurse girls. Sally stood up beside him, and the sun played with her hair.

"What's against it?" she asked defiantly. Elfrida had coached her.

"An actress!" Visions of home, of domestic ties and joys, the better life he was going to lead, had, in fact, begun to lead, were suddenly darkened and blotted out by her words.

"It's impossible! I—I—won't have it."

"You! *You* won't have it," she said contemptuously. "What have you got to do with it, I'd like to know?"

"You know you as good as promised."

"I promised nothing. You said we'd walk out together. And we walked out. But I've no call to give up anything I choose to do."

"You'd rather break my heart."

In vain he told her that it was not respectable, that she

would unfit herself to become the wife of a clerk at Messrs. Hall & Palmer's. He told her what Mary would say, and Alf; he used every argument at his command. Sally knew she would keep herself respectable, whatever she did; she had no fears, and some resentment.

"I can take care of myself," was what she said. But poor Charlie felt she would be lost to him. He, too, had been under the glamour when he was younger. In that poor fast life he had sampled, in the foyers of cheap music-halls, at drinking bars, and in the streets, the words "I've been an actress" had spelt sad histories. The best in him, that best which his love for Sally had awakened, wanted a home; he could not associate it with the word actress. He had an outside view of life, perhaps, but what he had seen negatived the possibility of the juxtaposition of the word "wife" with the word "actress." Charlie was hideously depressed and Sally was extraordinarily rude. She hated him for the misgivings with which he inspired her. She would not "let on" that his words made any impression, she gave him back his ring and repudiated any possible promise or engagement. By the time he left her at Ursula Rugeley's the breach between them was irreparable.

To Ursula the news was equally startling, but, being a more educated person, she had a more open mind. Also, whilst the word "actress" meant to Charlie Peastone a raddled, half-drunken creature, vagrant between the police court and the streets, to Ursula it meant the Terrys, or Winifred Emery, Mrs. Kendal, or Violet Vanbrugh. Ursula Rugeley was held captive by Sally Snape's charms; she had been fascinated from the first hour of their acquaintance. Sally's slowness in acquiring education had not impaired Ursula's belief that the girl could do anything on which she set her mind.

"I wish you were going to His Majesty's, or the Haymarket."

Prompted by Elfrida, Sally had said only that she was going on the stage, leaving out the fact that it was the music-hall stage upon which she would make her début.

"However, I am sure, since this Mr. Aarons has been so kind to you, he will see that you get into a nice company. But what about that young man you were telling me about, the one who is clerk at Messrs. Hall & Palmer's? What does he say about it?"

Sally flushed. She had been very angry with Charlie; her anger was due to the fact that so much of what he had said voiced her own feelings. She was full of misgivings.

"He doesn't like it at all. He said it was as good as going on the streets. I'm not going to have anything more to do with him. He took it on himself to say he shouldn't let me do it; it was like his impudence. I gave him back his ring."

"Oh dear, I am so sorry. I thought you were beginning to care for him. You know when he brought you here last Sunday you looked so bright and happy."

"It wasn't him, it was the river. We'd been to Richmond."

CHAPTER IX

MONDAY found Sally, very nervous, walking up and down, with Elfrida, outside a shop in the Borough Road, waiting for Joe Aarons.

"I'm sure I shan't be able to do a thing he tells me. I never could abide to be ordered about." She was quite pale, and in her least attractive mood. "As for singing or dancing this way or that to anybody's bidding . . ."

"Oh, buck up," said Elfrida. "I know Job Macher. I've had lessons with him before. He'll shout at you, and his language is awful, but you'll like him all the same. He is a splendid teacher, the best going."

"As for language, I'll give him as good as he brings."

"Don't you sauce him. You just try and get on. Don't forget the sooner you are ready the sooner you'll get your screw."

Just then Joe's hansom drove up. Joe had a flower in his buttonhole, and a big cigar in his mouth.

Mr. Macher's academy was over a newspaper and stationery shop, with which, somehow or other, tobacco was inextricably mingled.

"I'm in a tearing hurry. I've got to get back to the office in twenty minutes. Tom Peters is sending out five touring companies with 'The Boys from Burton,' and wants no end of girls. So hurry up, my dears. I'm glad you didn't keep me waiting."

He bustled them through the shop, where he seemed to be well known, for a man in shirt sleeves and a tidy-looking woman simultaneously said "good day."

"Mr. Macher is in his room," the woman said, but Joe was already half up the stairs, with the girls following.

The room was large, and bare, save for a piano, at which sat a seedy young man. Job came in a moment later, red-faced, red-nosed, and hoarse of voice.

"Morning, Macher. These are the girls I telephoned you about. You've got their song?"

"He's just trying it." Mr. Macher indicated the seedy young man. He was laconic, and wasted no time in greetings. "How long have I got?"

"Say a fortnight."

"Never done anything? Why, I've seen you before." This was to Elfrida.

"A year and a half ago. I only had ten days," she answered deprecatingly.

The dance-master looked inquiringly at Joe Aarons. He had had particular instructions about these new pupils. The song with dance had been sent to him, and it was a good one. But already he had given his verdict on Elfrida, and he was surprised to find it was she who was to have it. Joe made the position clear with a wink:

"This is Miss Snape; by the way, my dear, we must find a better name for you before you come out. She has the second part, a light soprano Mr. Hyams calls her voice. But it's the dance that matters. He's been up to see you about it, hasn't he? I must run away. Let me know how things go, and when they will be ready." Joe Aarons and Mr. Macher had a short whispered colloquy by the door.

"I couldn't do a thing here, I couldn't for the life of me," Sally said nervously to Elfrida.

"Oh, you'll be all right," she answered impatiently. "I wonder what our song is like. Have you got a copy of our song?" she asked the youth at the piano.

"The Tutti Frutti Girls?" he queried.

"Yes."

"It's here, it's in manuscript."

"Now then, young ladies." Mr. Macher was upon them. "Time wasted, wasted time. Why aren't you dressed?"

Elfrida knew, but had forgotten. Sally was startled, but found herself rushed into action. Mr. Macher's rasping voice penetrated to where they had been sent, to take off their walking skirts and boots, to put on shoes and abbreviated petticoats. It was all bustle and hurry, the piano and Mr. Macher's penetrating voice summoning them simultaneously.

"Now then, aren't you ready? How much longer? Come along now, I can't stay here all day."

It was Sally's extraordinary adaptability that made her success. Within ten minutes, all shyness, nervous fears, and doubts of herself dispelled, she was dancing, under Mr. Macher's directions, to the tunes the pianist read or improvised. Sally had forgotten the *gêne* of her short skirts, she was being taught to kick them out of her way. Mr. Macher had no sense of the ridiculous. If he wanted his pupils to do a thing, he showed them by doing it himself. He picked up his imaginary skirt, held up his ungainly leg in its black and white check trousers, put his ugly red face now to this side, now to the other, grinned at an imaginary audience, and showed his yellow, uneven teeth, all with complete unconsciousness of anything bizarre or unusual about his performance.

For half a century Job Macher had been teaching chorus girls to dance and sing. At one time or another he had had the majority of the music-hall stars under his able hands. He recognized a girl's capacity and limitations in one lesson. He tried to teach them only what he knew they could learn.

Elfrida Carthew had found him unexacting and com-

paratively easy to please. But then, he had known all about Harry Gordon's premium, and how little was expected of Miss Carthew, beyond keeping her place in the fourth row. Sally Snape was a very different proposition. It was not often that Joe Aarons paid for anybody. He was a purveyor rather than a speculator. Sally, after her first half hour, during which she had merely been allowed to show her incapacity, found herself, to her ultimate surprise, although in the excitement of movement she had hardly realized it, being screamed at, and sworn at, and ordered to do this and that, not once but six, seven, and even eight times, found herself in the grip of a tyrannous taskmaster, exhausted, out of breath, aching in every limb, but still unreleased.

Elfrida's vanity, which had been hurt by Joe Aarons' indifference, plumed itself again, and grew sleek while Sally was being bullied and abused, and her own efforts were left practically uncriticised. The two hours, during which it seemed to Sally she had done the hardest work she had ever done in her life, passed quite quickly and pleasantly to Elfrida. She would have been surprised if she had known that it was because the dancing-master knew there was no talent in her that he made no effort to bring it out.

It seemed to him that Sally had all the possibilities, and the earnestness she put into her work, the complete way in which she gave herself up to his teaching, endeavouring to carry out his orders, accentuated his desire to get her on. The bullying and swearing meant nothing; it was just his way. And, of course, Sally had everything to learn. She was ordered to come back in the afternoon for a singing lesson. In the meantime she might rest. Job was quite civil to her when the lesson was at an end.

"You'll have to work very hard if Joe Aarons wants you ready in a fortnight. I'm not at all sure the thing can

be done, not at all sure. You'll have to get the hang of it, the swing and go. There's no use moving to music, what you've got to do is to move to the audience. You've got to make 'em feel as if they were all dancing your dance, swaying and singing with you." He even went so far as to say: "You mustn't mind me swearing and cursing at you. You try and make me clap my hands and encore. You get me to do that, and you're all right. And it's to be done, mind you, it's to be done."

It was Job Macher's advice that Sally should practise dancing every day, and all day long, except for the hour or so with the singing-master. But her evenings were to be spent at the music-halls. Sally must get the trick of appealing to her audience. For to-night he gave them tickets for the Grecian, to hear Jenny Jones and Minnie Mason again. But he promised to speak to Joe Aarons about it, and see they were supplied with passes for the syndicate, and other, halls.

Sally fell in with her new life just as readily as she had fallen in with the factory routine, and the Brook Street ways. She did exercises, she skipped for hours before the glass, she danced and practised steps, and with some difficulty she learnt the words of the duet that Isaac Hyams had written for her. She spent her evenings trying to capture the secret of the applause that greeted this or the other popular favourite. In the first few days she was often too tired to sleep. She passed through the inevitable stage when she seemed to herself to be progressing backwards, to have grown stiffer and more ungainly, to have lost what little she had learnt. Job had to encourage, instead of swearing at her, the day she broke down. That was the day she burst into tears, and said she would give it up, she knew she was beat, she couldn't learn, and he was tired of trying to teach her.

"What, what! you crying? Well, I never! What did I say? You mustn't mind what I say; I only go on like that when I've got ground to work on. You'll be all right; it takes a little time. She's nothing to cry about, has she, Mr. Jones? Why, Mr. Jones was saying to me, only the moment before you came in, he wouldn't have believed you could have got on so quick; done so much in the time. Leave off crying; here, have a drop of this."

He was hoarsely kind, he put his own glass of rum and water to her lips, and, although she pushed it away, laughing and crying at the same time, he made her sip a little.

"I thought you meant I wasn't doing it any better than at first. I thought you'd got tired of teaching me."

"Tired of teaching you! Not me. You're getting on all right, but I wanted to surprise Joe Aarons, that's why I swore. He's coming to-morrow to see how it goes. Now, I want you to pull yourself together, and go through it once more. You aren't tired, are you?"

Of course Sally was tired, hysterical from fatigue, but she would have scorned now to admit it. When she had gone once more through the steps, however, he realized it, and let her go for the day:

"Now, don't you go out to-night; you go straight home, and go to bed. Turkish bath and massage would be the best thing for you, but I suppose it won't run to that? About to-morrow, Joe is coming at eleven with Mr. Hyams. You be here at 10.30 with Miss Carthew, and I think we'll show them something that will surprise them. How about your dresses? Has he said anything to you about them? You ought to wear tights, and as little else as possible. But I suppose that won't do for the Paragon," he said regretfully.

Sally, whose body during this fortnight had been treated as goods for the market, had ceased, or forgotten, to resent

it. Job had been so matter-of-fact in his allusions to her legs, to her back, to any and every part of her anatomy, that, after the first strangeness had worn off, she had fallen in with his views. She was glad of her straight legs, of her slender waist, of her suppleness. She had never had much time to think of herself, or her appearance, until she went to Brook Street. Since then she had thought of little else. Job Macher's methods taught her to give expression to her physical values, but in a way that left certain inherent modesties untouched. She drew on her first pair of borrowed tights, Job had lent them to her, and she wore with them the old merino bodice, and the short skirt in which she had taken all her dancing lessons. This was the costume in which she appeared before Joe Aarons and his partner. Her hair was parted in the middle, the mass of it coiled low down on her neck. Her face was flushed, and her eyes were dark with excitement. She was going to do her best, she was going to do Mr. Macher credit, after all the trouble he had taken with her. But she had no more *gêne* about her exposed legs than a child in shoes and socks.

Joe and Isaac Hyams were there on business. Tom Peters had taken all the available metropolitan talent for his "Boys from Burton," the greatest success he had had for years. The halls were languishing for fresh talent, the public was already tired of psychic manifestations and American humour. If, and Joe Aarons rarely made a mistake, Sally Snape was any good, his agreement with her was a bank-note. Isaac Hyams wanted to see how his music went. Neither of them wasted time in considering Sally's strange toilette. Elfrida, her skin-tight jersey matching her pink skirt, was of little interest to them.

"Let 'em go ahead," said Joe, and Mr. Jones struck up the "Tutti Frutti Girls." He did not have a chance

for more than those opening chords. Without the least ceremony, Mr. Hyams pushed him off the stool. "I'll play," he said. "Now, then, get on with it."

Elfrida knew her words perfectly, she ogled and was arch. Her voice was shrill, and it carried. She was the quintessence of commonplace; there is not a music-hall in London that does not boast an artist more or less her counterpart. To say she had no talent is to give her performance undue prominence. She had the talent of creating an atmosphere, the atmosphere of the lower-class places of amusement. One saw and heard the jokes about drink and unfaithful husbands, mothers-in-law, and police; almost one smelt the smoke, and the stale beer, and the breaths of the people. The spirit of a lewd, vulgar, and leering familiarity was in the use she made of her words, the gestures with which she accompanied them. There were four men in the room, and none of them considered her.

But, against the atmosphere Elfrida created, Sally moved like music, *was* music. Isaac Hyams found himself following, instead of leading, her. The words she sang were as meaningless as if they had come from the lips of a child, tunefully, softly, she seemed to sing them under her breath, all her breath she wanted for Job Macher's dance. And she danced it exquisitely, with grace and meaning, and a curious intentness. She combined the air of the novice practising her steps with the neatness and finish of the perfected artist. Her ingenuous eyes asked for praise when she had finished. But for the moment there was silence.

Isaac Hyams' extraordinary vanity outleapt the emotion her performance had evoked.

"Well, I hit it neatly, didn't I?" he asked Joe. "That's what they want, the contrast of the Tutti girl from Devon,

with the Frutti girl from Town. It's going to take London, that show is. They'll find me out in time, and Tom Peters will leave off going to Jones and Daintree and Clive Jackson for songs and music. Who are you going to offer them to? Not Albert!"

Then they all began to talk at once, and discuss which of the music-hall managers should have the first refusal of "The Tutti Frutti Girls." Job found time to throw a word of praise to Sally, and the girls were dismissed to dress. The animated discussion resulted in the decision for the Grecian. Job, who was listened to with respect, was against rushing Sally too quickly to the West End. He said she was uncertain, her work wanted steadying. She ought to go on having lessons. Joe had got hold of a good thing, but he must be careful how he used it.

"Mark you, she's no genius. It's the make of her, and a natural ear for music; that's all you've got to go on. She's not bitten with the life, either. You'll make a mistake if you go too quick with her; wait until she catches right on to it. Just now she thinks the other girl is the important one, and that she must keep in the background. That helps the effect, but you'll have to watch, and see what happens when she's learnt her value; it might just knock it to bits. There is no telling with this sort. But don't you run away with the idea, because I've managed to teach her a song and a dance, that you've got a born genius to deal with."

Joe Aarons prided himself on having discovered Sally. Isaac Hyams was convinced, now and always, that it was to his song and dance she owed her subsequent career. Job Macher felt it was he who had moulded her, and her destinies, with his fortnight's teaching.

And Sally? Sally did not think at all, she just let circumstance guide her.

It guided her, a very few days after this, to the manager of the Grecian music-hall, in a four-wheel cab, with Joe Aarons and Mr. Hyams and Miss Elfrida Carthew.

The manager was busy and indifferent. He eyed the girls with more suspicion than favour. He told Joe Aarons, abruptly, that all his geese were swans. He didn't mind hearing them, but he was sick of amateurs. Joe told him this would be the first appearance in England of The Sisters Mainwaring, and the information left him cold. Joe really did his best for them, and tried to make Mr. Twallin think he was getting the offer of a lifetime. But Mr. Twallin had had so many such opportunities!

Joe thought "The Sisters Mainwaring" sounded very well. Sally was to be "Sarita" from this time onward. He impressed upon her that "Sally Snape" wouldn't do, wouldn't do at all. It was vulgar. Sarita was the ticket, Miss Sarita Mainwaring.

Miss Sarita Mainwaring was immediately depressed by Mr. Twallin's manner. She had been buoyed up by Job Macher's praise, by the obvious satisfaction of Joe Aarons, and by another song which Mr. Hyams hummed to her in the cab. The last two or three days, too, Elfrida had talked of nothing but the triumph they were going to have, of the applause that already reverberated in her ears, of the enthusiasm with which "old Twallin" would greet their "turn."

It was in the reaction of the depression caused by Mr. Twallin's indifference that she was called upon to give her performance.

"All right, then, let's see what they can do. I'll be back in a minute, I must just see what that damned fool, Doone, is up to. We've got the Fosters from Brussels over for to-night, and the trouble they're giving with their apparatus makes me sick. I can't understand half they

say, and their interpreter don't know a word of any language. Not a thing can I ever get done unless I do it myself," he grumbled. "My idiot of a carpenter manages to provide himself with an accident, and, so help me God, I believe his assistant is half-witted. Look at him now!"

They were standing on the steps, and Johnny Doone, on a ladder, was occupied, or should have been occupied, in fixing an iron staple to a rafter. But, at the moment Mr. Twallin looked up, Johnny Doone looked down, and Sally's was the face on which his eyes rested. So his mouth fell, and his eyes looked fixed as if he saw an apparition. Of course, Mr. Twallin thought he was a congenital idiot; his expression would have earned him a certificate.

He was brought to himself by a few well-directed oaths. Neither he nor Sally had the social ease to carry the situation. Sally wondered how Johnny came there. She had seen little of Johnny since she came out of hospital. He said she had grown too grand for him; anyway, she wouldn't walk out with him, and he never saw her.

Much had happened to Johnny, or so he accounted it, and regular work was the outcome of the happenings. Outwardly, he was a stage-carpenter, and a poor one, according to Mr. Twallin. But inwardly he was a "child of grace," and much uplifted by a recent conversion.

"Put that blasted stanchion in before the hook. Can't you see, you b——y idiot, that it's got nothing to hold to? We shall have an accident here to-night, and all London talking about the danger of these shows."

"Well, they'll come and see them all the more," Joe interpolated comfortingly.

When they had passed through the dirt and débris on to the stage, it seemed that the band, ordered to put in an early attendance, had failed to appear at all. There was

delay, with more swearing. Isaac Hyams was prepared to supply the place of the entire orchestra, had there been a piano available. But the particular workmen, whose work it was to move the piano, were all occupied with the Foster apparatus. It was not until the girls were weary with waiting, Joe Aarons irritable, and Isaac absorbed in a "carpenter's symphony," the idea of which had just dawned upon him, that a start was made. A desperately bad start it was. The girls had brought their short skirts with them, but Mr. Twallin said he couldn't wait whilst they put them on. Elfrida showed temper, and said she couldn't dance in a long skirt and walking boots. Mr. Twallin replied indifferently:

"Please yourself, my dear, either dance or leave it alone!"

Joe Aarons told her, *sotto voce*, not to make a fool of herself. The piano was finally dragged upon the stage by the gas-fitter and one of the firemen, but it was out of tune. And Isaac Hyams' fingers were out of touch. He had lost interest in his duet; the symphony now was running in his mind.

Under the circumstances it was hardly strange that Mr. Twallin was not enraptured with the entertainment. The *verve* had gone out of it. Sally moved as if she were an automaton, Elfrida's shrillness was ill-tempered; even the tune seemed to have lost its catch. Mr. Twallin's bored expression gave the key into which the little show seemed to fall.

"It isn't new, and it isn't good, and what there is of it they can't do," he said to Joe Aarons when the performance drew flatly to its conclusion.

But his eye was upon Sally, led there, perhaps, more through her extraordinary incompetence than any other quality. And, as his eye fell upon Sally, hers had followed Johnny Doone, descending his ladder now, and still

staring at her. She laughed up at him, the old laugh; the show was over, and, for the moment, she did not seem to care much what had been the effect of it. Mr. Aarons was talking to the manager, and why shouldn't she have a word with an old friend?

"Well, you are surprised at seeing me here; you look struck all of a heap with it," she called out to Johnny. "I suppose you thought I never should get away from Brook Street?"

"You don't dance as well as you used." That was all the stupid fellow could find to say; it did not in the least reflect what he was feeling.

She laughed again, this time loudly. Mr. Twallin, from the front of the house, said to Joe abruptly:

"They can have a week, extra turn, usual arrangement. If it goes, it goes; if not, that's the end of it. I must get away now. Monday, eight sharp."

Outside, Joe, immensely relieved, quite in good humour again, spoke seriously to the girls.

"You didn't do your best, neither of you. But you've got your chance all the same."

Joe had had a moment of anxiety; no one knew better than he how poor an effect had been made with the song and dance. He had missed that laugh of Miss Sarita Mainwaring's which had suddenly changed Mr. Twallin's decision to "turn the lot down." Joe thought Mr. Twallin a cleverer man than he was, he thought the possibilities of the duet had been recognized.

The few next days were taken up with further preparation. Sally went on with her lessons, and was fitted with her dress. Mr. Hyams had ordained it was to be of green satin, curtailed just above the knees; the petticoats were also to be green. It was to be garlanded with wild flowers, she was to wear a large hat covered with poppies

and corn, Dolly Varden shape, tied under her chin with scarlet ribbons, and, during one part of the dance, she was to take it off and swing it in her hand. He thought the scarlet ribbons would make an effect against the green. Elfrida was to be entirely in scarlet. The simplicity of the country and the sinfulness of the town were supposed to be exemplified by this colouring. Isaac Hyams always had his limitations, he has them still. He is never allowed to dress his plays; all Tom Peters' agreements with him have this proviso.

Sally told Johnny, from the first, how ugly her dress was, and how she hated it. For Johnny and she had met after the trial performance, and almost daily since. Johnny said:

"Then don't you stick to it. Say nothing to nobody, but order it different. No one will know until you come on, and then they can't do nothing; I've heard lots of them say they've done that."

Johnny heard all about Sally's change of occupation, and how it came about. Sally heard of poor Sandy Kirk's death, and of the scripture reader who sat with him, almost to the end, and of Johnny's conversion. But why, upon the strength of it, Johnny should have left the docks to become a carpenter was difficult to explain. "Reg'lar work" was the keynote of it. Johnny was a born lounger, one of the British workmen who habitually runs his Saturday afternoons into Tuesday mornings. To the God-fearing employer of labour, who had used the opportunity of poor Sandy's death-bed to bring his room-mate to a late confirmation, this seemed the point at which to aim.

"Anyhow, it came about, here I be, and I'm glad of it. I've always been fond of you, Sal, always shall be. I can walk home with you sometimes of nights. It isn't the sort of life I should have thought you'd have chose."

"Well! I didn't so much as choose it. But now I'm in it, I'd like to get on."

"You ain't walking out with that Peastone fellow still?"

"Not me. He said it wasn't respectable."

"Come to that, neither's the dressmaking. You recollect Emmy Powers. . . ."

"It isn't the life, it's the people as leads it," she said sententiously, yet ignorantly. She knew all about Emmy Powers, and the way Phil Rankin treated her when he'd had his way with her; but she was a poor-spirited thing, anyway. "I shan't get into no more mischief on the stage than off it," she said, a little uncomfortable, nevertheless.

"I'll look after you."

"I can look after myself."

The immediate result of Johnny's sympathetic suggestion was that Sally went behind Isaac Hyams' instructions, and ordered white ribbons for the hat, pale cornflowers and daisies instead of poppies. The green, too, to which she persuaded the costumier, instead of being crude, as Isaac had visualized it, was almost white, so pale and vague was the colour in it.

On the first night of Sally's and Elfrida's appearance at the music-hall, Joe Aarons was in the stalls, and Isaac was in the circle, Job Macher in the gallery, and Johnny Doone at the back. "Extra turn" was on the board, "The Mainwaring Sisters (first appearance in London)" was on the programme.

Mr. Twallin, in the wings, gave Sally an approving nod:

"Pretty gal?" he said to the dresser.

"Well, Miss Mainwaring, and how are you feeling to-night? Nervous, eh? This really is your first appearance, isn't it? There's the band striking up; you've got a good house. Smile at them when you go on."

She smiled at him, instead, and he noted the dimples in her cheek.

"It's my dress I'm thinking of," she said simply.

"What's the matter with it?"

He eyed her more closely. "It's very good. The skirt is too long, or Miss Elfrida's is too short; they ought both to have been the same. But never mind about that now. Have you seen the house?"

He showed it to her through an aperture in the slip. But it was only a smoke cloud she saw, with a sea of colourless faces beyond. She could distinguish nobody.

"I'm not a bit frightened," she said nervously.

To-night Isaac Hyams got the exact effect he had planned. Elfrida, primed with drink, in her scarlet frock, was vulgar, wicked, and provocative. Her hair was so very yellow, and her hat was so very elaborate, that the pink in her cheeks and the scarlet in her lips were essential, behind the footlights, in bringing out the fact that she had any features at all.

Sally had been fortunate in her dresser. She, her arms, her cheeks, and her lips, were all pale together; her red hair hung long past her waist, in two heavy plaits tied with white ribbon. She moved, she looked, she sang, she danced, with grace and unconscious charm. She was a complete foil to Elfrida; the amateurishness of the one accentuating the stale professionalism of the other. They had quite a little success, and were called before the curtain. That was the moment Sally saw Job Macher in the gallery, and, of course, it was at him she smiled and nodded. But that little smile and nod did her more good than her performance. Its spontaneity warmed the hearts of several gallery boys, who took it for themselves, and they gave her a fresh and encouraging salvo. Altogether everybody was pleased.

"It will go better by the end of the week," Joe said to them, afterwards. He was quite confident now. He spoke particularly to Sally. "You'll get the size of the hall better, and let yourself go to it. They couldn't hear you upstairs to-night. You'll have to sing out, and dance out — then you'll do."

And he was right. Each evening was better than the last. They were quickly promoted from the first "extra" turn to the last. At the end of the fourth performance, the house was singing the refrain for them. Sally had caught on, she was already a favourite, her smile was waited for, her laughter encouraged. She was a natural dancer, and grew more assured and gayer every evening. Her small voice was always right in the centre of the note, and it had its own charm; a piping birdlike simplicity was in it. It carolled rather than sang, with lapses into utter forgetfulness, whispers, and strange breaks. Sally's memory and education were at fault, but her audience thought it was all part of the performance. Within a week the duet went with a swing, and people were crowding into the Grecian to hear it. Sally even achieved the distinction of being imitated, first at another hall, then here, in the very place of her triumph, by that eminent caricaturist, Mr. Cis Whigham. He made the most effective breaks and hoarseness, he opened ingenuous eyes, and played the wondering child, then he too broke into dazzling smiles and rippling laughter, and got his roars of applause, as the cleverness of the impersonation was realized.

Sally was hurt about it at first, and Johnny offered to punch his head. But Joe told her it was doing her good, so did Mr. Twallin, and Job Macher; they agreed it was bound to do her good. So Sally tried not to mind. She also tried to alter her methods, to avoid the mannerisms he imitated, but without conspicuous success.

The engagement had been a tentative one. At the end of the time, Mr. Twallin offered them fifteen pounds a week, and a six weeks' agreement. But Joe refused the offer. He struck out for twenty pounds, and got it. He might have obtained even more, but he knew to a penny what the hall held, and as he was always doing business with Mr. Twallin, he did not want to kill the golden goose. He would let the girls sign on for a month only; he was getting a swelled head over Sally.

"There's thousands in her," he told Isaac, confidentially; "it's not many men that would have picked her out on the Parade at Brighton."

"Much good you'd have done without my song," retorted his cousin.

The first week that Sally got her three pounds was a landmark to her. It seemed wealth, it was quite out of proportion with anything she had previously earned. She was still sharing a room with Elfrida, although they were not congenial companions. They paid six-and-six for the room. They had their meals together, and the whole expenses they shared came to something less than a pound.

At last Sally would be able to put by something. Miss Rugeley had always been urging it, but until now Sally had never had more than sixteen shillings a week, and she had found it difficult to live and dress out of that, almost impossible to save. The second week, Joe, in high good humour, said to her:

"Now, what would you do with a five-pound note if I gave it to you?"

"Buy some clothes," she said promptly.

"Will you give me a kiss for it? You owe me one for all I've done for you."

Sally was attacked on the most vulnerable side of her nature, her sense of gratitude. She looked at the bald-

headed, beaky Jew. It was at his office, where she had called, as arranged, for her salary. It was more than likely she would have said yes, and Joe Aarons had the look of a man who had already received the boon, so shiny and complacent and beaming was he, when the door opened abruptly to admit Mr. Edgar Levi. Mr. Edgar Levi was Tom Peters' henchman. This was business, and might be important business. Sally was dismissed with a nod:

"All right, my dear, that must wait"—this with a wink that evoked Sally's light merriment. "Here's the money, anyway. I'll come round soon and see how you've spent it."

"Who's that?" said Edgar Levi, almost before the door had closed. "I haven't seen her before, have I?" He was as quick-witted as his co-religionist.

"Something new, my boy, something new," answered Joe in a voice of triumph. "Tom Peters hasn't got all the talent in London. That girl is going to beat the band. You mark my words, she's another Letty Lind."

"Dances?"

"Like a bird."

"Where's she on?"

"She is doing a turn at the Grecian until I fix her up better."

"Not the Mainwaring Sisters?"

It was Edgar Levi's business to know everything that went on in the world of entertainment, and he did his business thoroughly. No success escaped him. But the Grecian was a strange place to look for talent.

"That's the ticket, Miss Sarita Mainwaring, who's drawing all London to the East End."

"Oh, all London — that's good! You mean she's having a success with the Commercial Road. She is singing 'The Tutti Frutti Girls,' isn't she? What time is it on?"

"Ten. It's *the* turn."

"Well, you needn't be so proud about it. *You* don't sing it."

After a few amenities, Mr. Levi unfolded the object of his visit, which did not happen to concern Sally, so may remain unrecorded. But, after the necessary amount of bargaining had been gone through, and Edgar Levi was at the door, he said, condescendingly:

"I'll come and hear your flier to-night. You'd better bring her to supper at the Roman's. She's not a bad-looking little lot. What will you do for me if I bring Tom too?"

"It's his loss if he doesn't hear 'em soon. They won't go begging."

"Well, bring her to supper."

"There's two of them," Joe said.

"The more the merrier. Tom may have Muriel with him, she's out of the bill. I'll tell Fritz to keep a table for six, upstairs. The Grecian, you said? Ten o'clock?"

This was important. Tom Peters was Joe Aarons' objective for Sally from the very first. That three pounds a week agreement was made in view of just such a possibility. Fortunately, Sally was still in the outer office. Elfrida had not yet been paid, and Sally was waiting with her; impatiently waiting, for she wanted to be spending her five-pound note.

Joe Aarons called them in after Edgar Levi had gone, and talked to them seriously.

"I'm going to take you two girls out to supper after the show to-night, so you make yourselves look very smart. And mind, you're to do your very best performance; there's no saying who may be in the house."

He added further instructions, impressing upon them the importance of the evening. But it was Elfrida who explained the situation.

"He's got some West End manager to come down; I shouldn't wonder if it isn't Tom Peters; you see if I'm not right! It's quite time he did take us out to supper; you bet he's coining money over us. I told you you were a fool to sign that agreement. He'll have to give me more, or I shan't go on."

But incidentally it may be related that, when, later on, she brought her claims forward to Joe Aarons, his reply was terse:

"Don't you make a damn fool of yourself, my dear. It isn't you they are mimicking, is it? Haven't you tumbled to that? I can replace you in ten seconds; it isn't you they're running after. You be glad I don't want any one better as a foil to Miss Sally, and don't talk to me about a rise. Why don't you find some one to look after you? That's your line, you know. Harry Gordon isn't the only fish in the sea. Good-bye. Don't run away with the idea you're underpaid. You're overpaid."

Sally, with eight pounds in her pocket, with Joe Aarons' instructions impressed upon her, that she must look her best this evening, wanted sympathy and help. Elfrida was useless, she was neither sympathetic nor helpful at any time.

Sally went mentally over her list of friends. Johnny was always the most understanding, but he was difficult to get at. However, fortune favoured her, for she met him in the Strand, in his workman's clothes, carrying a tool basket. Elfrida was disgusted with her for stopping to speak to him:

"I shall go on if you do. I can't be seen talking to a working man."

"I want to ask him something."

Prosperity had no effect on Sally's simplicity; she ran after Johnny, and called to him.

"Hello, Sal, that you?"

"How fast you walk. Stop a bit, I want to ask you something."

It all tumbled out at once.

"I am going to supper with Mr. Aarons to-night. There is a West End manager coming to see us, he told me I was to look very nice, and I've only got . . ."

Johnny had been long enough in the theatrical world to know the importance of the announcement. He agreed with Sally that she must look her best.

"Not but what you always look better than most. All the fellows say so, I stand about and listen. You're a real success, Sal, a tip-topper."

But Sally distrusted herself, her taste, her talent. And eight pounds seemed quite a fortune; she did not mind if she spent the whole of it, she was in a reckless mood. A brilliant idea struck her, and set her heart beating, her cheeks flushing. It struck Johnny Doone at the same time, and he voiced it.

"Why don't you see if that fellow in Brook Street is back? You thought such a lot of him."

"Mr. Perry?" She looked at Johnny. "Might I? Could I, do you think I could ask him?"

Johnny was of the opinion that she could do what she liked, now, or at any time. But then, Johnny had never been impressed by anybody except Sally, and, temporarily, the scripture reader.

Sally hung about outside the shop in Brook Street after she left Johnny. She had taken the Tube to the West End, and all the short time between the stations, and all the long time, waiting for the lift to ascend, she was framing what she would say to Mr. Perry. Nearly an hour she spent, walking up and down Brook Street, lacking courage to say it. It was only when she had persuaded herself that it was

more than likely that he wasn't back that she ventured in. Miss Baines might help her, she was always kind.

But Mr. Perry was back, looking ill, having grown thin, and, for the moment, a little less assertive than before. He had been back only two days, yet it was wonderful how quickly he was gathering together the threads of the business. He had missed Miss Snape, and asked for her, expressing surprise when Miss Baines did not know what had become of her. He did not seem to think it anything out of the way when she came in.

"Oh, there you are, Miss Snape. I've been asking for you. Why did you run away? You haven't done any better, I suppose. I've got some models coming from Paris. Miss Baines, where is that grey delaine? Let Miss Snape put it on, please, and the black voile. . . ."

It was all as it had been. Sally stood transfixed, ready to take off her dress and try on the fine clothes; she responded immediately to the old spell and influence. It was Miss Baines who roused her. The clothes had only come from Paris this morning, they were not yet unpacked.

"Have you come back to us?" she asked Sally. "I must see Madame Violetta; she was very vexed at your going so abruptly; so was Lady Dorothea, wasting the premium and everything. . . ."

"I've not come back to stay," Sally stammered out. "I wanted to ask you, to ask Mr. Perry, to — to help me."

Miss Baines eyed her curiously. Sally looked well-fed and happy, her eyes were shining, her hair was glossy and well-kept; but the colour came and went in her cheeks, evidently her errand made her shy.

"What is it, child?" Miss Baines said, not unkindly; Mr. Perry was by her side listening for the answer.

"I've not come to be taken back. I'm on the stage now."

"On the stage!" ejaculated Miss Baines.

"And to-night I'm going to supper with Mr. Aarons, and Mr. Peters may be coming to see me act, and . . ." here her voice quivered, "I've nothing to wear, nothing! I've got eight pounds; I'm getting a good salary, I thought perhaps you'd help me." She got all this out at once, breathlessly.

Miss Baines asked details, and plied Sally with questions. Mr. Perry's whole interest was in the clothes. He eyed Sally's old black merino with the old disfavour.

"Where are you going to sup?"

Sally did not know.

Mr. Perry, calling her "child" impatiently, told her everything hinged upon that. If it was the Carlton or the Savoy, she would want evening dress, opera cloak, everything. But, if it were to Gatti's or Frascati's or one of the Strand restaurants, it would have to be walking dress, it was only a question of something becoming.

"Bring down that toque, with the apple blossoms, please," he shouted, in the middle of the questioning, quite in the old manner.

Sally told him she had once before been out with Mr. Aarons, and he had taken her to Frascati's. She thought he had said something about the Roman's, for to-night. Mr. Perry finally decided for her that it was most probable Romano's would be her destination. That was after he had heard the details which had been supplied to Miss Baines already, when he learned she was appearing at the Grecian music-hall, and her stage name was Sarita Mainwaring, and Tom Peters was going to see her dance. He looked at her now with new interest. She realized this, and her eyes and smiles grew happier.

He tried Sally with dress after dress, as soon as the models had been unpacked. He tempted her with one exquisite

confection after another. Again the greed and longing rose in her heart. She loved herself in these beautiful rich, soft-lined things; she wanted them all.

"If Tom Peters takes a fancy to you, you'll be able to have all you want, Miss Snape," he said cheerfully, lounging against the door, surveying her in a marvel of pink *crêpe de Chine* and mauve pansies. Mr. Perry never stood upright, with legs together and shoulders straight; he stood always like a cab-horse, in a broken-down way, as if weak under his size, now on one leg, now on another. Presently he sat down, and followed the proceedings from the velvet fauteuil.

He finally decided that Miss Snape was to have the loan of a black silk dress, the entire top of which was of real white lace, of exquisite quality. The corselet bodice defined her rounded waist, the shoulder-straps were embroidered, and the colours of the embroidery were repeated in the flowers of her hat. Clad in this, with the hat in position, the lace dexterously pulled out and arranged by Mr. Perry, there was no doubt Sally looked radiant.

"Oh, Mr. Perry! May I really, can I really wear all these? Oh! aren't they wonderful, Miss Baines?"

Her eyes demanded admiration, and pleaded for it. Mr. Perry was artist enough to recognize the entire success of the toilette. It was characteristic of him to have forgotten that Sally so short a time ago had been merely an assistant in the shop, and now was only a beginner at a cheap music-hall. Mr. Perry decided that Tom Peters should see her just like this. The model fitted her, because, of course, the model had been made for her. He sent for a cape, all lace and ermine, and threw it round her, then surveyed her again.

"There, that's the way you are to go to-night. We'll lend you these, won't we, Miss Baines? You bring them

back, the first thing in the morning. And mind you take care of them. Take them off now. Miss Baines, we must have a little embroidery added where the straps meet the corselet, and . . ."

Here followed one or two more inspirations. Sally might wear the get-up just as it was, but he saw his way to improvements when it should be returned.

Sally got out a timid word about her eight pounds.

"You've got on a sixty-guinea dress, and an eight-guinea hat; that cape isn't priced yet. A hundred a week is your salary; he'll know you can't dress like that under the figure. Don't you be foolish with him, you stand out for your price. And mind you don't go anywhere else for your clothes," he said laughingly, before he went out to lunch.

She was in a whirl of excitement over his words, over his new interest. Miss Baines gave a word of warning, almost womanly; it was only her loyalty to Mr. Perry prevented her saying more:

"You look before you leap; it isn't all plain sailing. Haven't you got any one belonging to you? I should think twice before I went to supper with Mr. Peters."

"There's ever so many others going. Did you hear Mr. Perry saying I wasn't to dress from anywhere but here?"

"Mr. Perry gets carried away."

"He really does think I'll get on."

Miss Baines sighed.

"Well, I suppose you'll go your own way!" she said.

Later on in the day Mr. Perry boasted to Miss Baines:

"Didn't I tell you that girl would get on? Tom Peters won't grudge her her clothes, and she'll pay for dressing.

Don't let her go anywhere else. I'll see her myself when she comes in to-morrow. If I'd had time I'd have given her something simpler. I shall look in at the Grecian to-night, and see how she does."

CHAPTER X

TOM PETERS was large and dark and ponderous. His black hair had a curious wiry kink, he grew no beard, his lips were almost negroid. His manner was heavy and sleepy, and the first impression he conveyed was one of amiable stupidity. Yet his astuteness, not only in his business, but in his ventures on the green cloth, or at any game of chance, was proverbial. The deadliest sharper eventually gave him best, and neither Jews nor Americans had any advantage over him at poker, bridge, or écarté. He had played baccarat with adventurers at foreign gambling-hells, and emerged a winner. He had hosts of acquaintances, but very few intimates. These few intimates would admiringly boast that he never "put them on a good thing." That no one knew from whence he sprung, who were his belongings, which was his race or country, made his personality the more remarkable. He spoke English like an Englishman, but the palms of his hands were unusually dark, and the shape of his head suggested a turban.

His business was that of theatrical entrepreneur. It was lucrative because his theatres provided meeting houses for the *jeunesse dorée* of the Metropolis and the nascent beauties of the stage. He was the *doyen* of the species of entertainment known as musical comedy. At his own, and the entertainment's zenith, the Colonies, Europe, and the English provinces were ransacked for young and pretty girls. It was Tom Peters' department to exhibit the re-

sults of the quest adequately, in becoming or scanty clothes, going through any small performance for which the opportunity arose. Then the young men came and gazed at them, came and came again.

Tom had started with one theatre, but, at the time he introduced Sally Snape he had four, and all of them were successful. Such houses always will be successful, so long as human nature remains as it is. Those under the care of Tom Peters were admirably, and most decorously, conducted.

It was the women that drew the town, as much, perhaps, as the comedy or the music, the singing or the acting. Tom Peters, realizing this, spent himself in securing the monopoly of all the women whom the young men wanted to see. He was quick on the track of beauty, popularity, or talent. He and his henchmen were specious in argument, skilful in driving a bargain. Theirs was the market-place for girls; there was little doubt of that. Marriage was not always the desideratum, but, when the bait was required, it was pointed out that more than one great marriage had been achieved by Tom Peters' brigade of girls. This, and dinners, suppers, drives, jewellery, were all lures; these were his bonuses, which accounted for low salary lists and an always large competition for engagements.

To-night he was to see Sally Snape for the first time. He occupied the stage box, and with him was his faithful satellite, Edgar Levi. Joe Aarons, very proud and important, and Isaac Hyams, with the plan of a new operetta in his pocket, sat there with him. Mr. Twallin came and went, very proud of his guest, very self-important.

But Tom's attention to all of them was perfunctory; he looked extremely stupid, and rather bored. Presently the house recognized him, he had bowed his thanks too often

after a successful first night not to be recognized, even at the Grecian. The gallery boys made quite a demonstration in his honour, cat-calling, and, in the intervals between the numbers, singing the chorus of the "Hoo-bally-roo Boys" from that brilliant play, "The Boys from Burton."

Mr. Peters acknowledged their recognition with his good-humoured sleepy smile. Then suddenly Joe Aarons got excited, and whispered:

"Here she is, Mr. Peters; here she comes. Number ten is her."

Number ten it was, and the house seemed to hush itself in expectation. The conductor struck the desk sharply with his bâton; the curtain was up, the limelight turned on, and Elfrida Carthew bounded on the stage, in her scarlet frock and yellow hair, and with her shrill voice, started the opening verse of the "Tutti Frutti Girls."

It was only an instant, but in that instant Tom Peters began to yawn. She was such a familiar figure to him; her voice, style, and manner were all of the traditional, stale, music-hall variety. Daily he rejected many dozens of her type. Already he was saying that Edgar was a fool to drag him here, Joe Aarons a fool to imagine . . .

His yawn and his comment had no climax, they remained embryonic, half-finished things.

Sally had even less voice than usual to-night. She was shockingly nervous and self-conscious and amateurish. But Tom Peters never finished his yawn; her grace caught him, her curious charm held him. He woke up, and leaned forward, listening to her first verse; her pauses, lapses, hoarseness, were bewildering.

"She can't sing," he grumbled.

But they saw he never took his eyes from her. Sally was hardly made up at all, she was very pale, and before the end of her first verse her voice had died away almost

completely. She cast a look of appeal at the house, quite tremulous; and she shook her head. Then it was that the gallery boys proved themselves. Quickly perceptive, they seemed to realize, all at once, the connection between Tom Peters, sitting white-waistcoated and prominent in the front of Box A, and their favourite's sudden loss of voice. They threw themselves gallantly into the breach; they rose to her rescue like men. They took up her refrain, they sang it through, as she stood, half paralyzed, with that appealing look on her child face. They sang their encouragement; they knew the words and the tune, and the band supported them.

Now she smiled gratefully at them; quietly, timorously almost, she began her dance. They applauded at once, calling her by name, urging her on. Gradually she caught fire from their sympathy, her nervous smile turned to happy laughter, her dance grew in quickness, spontaneity, gaiety. She forgot Tom Peters, Joe Aarons' instructions, and all her fears. She danced as she had danced to the organ in her alley, revelling in the music and the movement. When she had finished, it was a triumphant look she threw to Joe Aarons in the box with the great Mr. Peters; there was a touch of the *gamin* in it. She knew she had done well. She would not do any more; she shook her head at the gallery when they encored her, but she smiled them her thanks, she made them know she was grateful.

Edgar Levi clapped his hands enthusiastically again and again.

"She's gòt 'em," he said. "She's got 'em. She's a bally wonder. She can't sing for nuts, and there's nothing extra about her dancing, but just listen to them; a wonder, I call her."

He had an emotional, generous temperament; he was altogether different from his master.

Tom neither applauded, nor spoke of the performance.

The others were disappointed; but Edgar knew it was all right, when he said, in that incongruous, soft voice of his, almost plaintively:

"You might telephone to Jupe, Edgar, that I'm too tired to go out to-night. How can he expect me to play bridge with so much on my mind? It's so inconsiderate."

Edgar would not for worlds have reminded him that it was he who had arranged the bridge party at Mr. Jupe's. Tom said a little more to Edgar, about to-morrow's rehearsal. It was called for two new speeches, in what was advertised as "a second edition of The Boys from Burton." He spoke as if those two sentences were the only interest he had in the world. Joe Aarons was depressed, but Edgar was beaming; he knew Tom's ways.

Number eleven was on now. It was an acrobatic act. Tom talked to Mr. Twallin about that, and complimented him on the mechanism.

"What do you think of Miss Mainwaring?" Mr. Twallin was indiscreet enough to ask.

Tom's brow contracted; he looked peevish, all at once.

"She's got no voice," he complained, "no voice at all."

"Pretty?"

"Is she?"

"Well, the boys like her. I'm rather glad you don't. Joe has put her price up twice, haven't you, Joe?" Mr. Twallin said indifferently. He had nothing to gain by Tom's approval. He was just as gratified if his acrobats pleased the great man.

By this time Joe was in an agony of apprehension and disappointment. Tom Peters was such a good judge. What if Sally's success proved only a flash in the pan? The money had been spent on Sally's education, and the agreements procured, all with the view to Tom Peters. Now he said she couldn't sing!

"But she can dance," he urged, "you must say she can dance. And look at her figure; and the way she moves."

Tom sat stolid, as if he heard nothing. The acrobats seemed to entertain him, and he did not begin to yawn again until a throaty baritone struck up a patriotic song about the "Empire over the Seas."

"Haven't we had enough of this?" he asked Edgar then.

"You might let Mr. Aarons bring the girls to sup with us," Edgar persuaded; "we might as well see 'em close."

"Which girls?" Tom asked, as he got up. "What girls?" as if he had been a little deaf.

"The sisters Mainwaring. He's awfully disappointed you haven't lost your heart to Miss Sarita. Aren't you, Joe?"

"Which is Miss Sarita? Not the one who shrieks? All right, let her come." Edgar helped him into his satin-lined opera-coat.

"I'll stay and bring them," he said tentatively, winking at Joe.

"No, no," Tom answered pettishly, like a spoilt child, "you come with me."

"It's all right, don't you worry, it's as right as rain," Edgar found the opportunity to whisper to Joe Aarons. "Mind, I shall expect something out of it," he added.

The very fact of Tom Peters putting off Jupe told Edgar he was taken with Miss Sarita Mainwaring, and that he had quite made up his mind to sup with Joe Aarons and the Mainwaring sisters. Tom loved cards, and Jupe was not only his solicitor, but one of his intimates, yet he had thrown him over. Edgar had no doubt of the result. Tom would give Miss Sarita an engagement; a percentage of the amount of her salary would go into his own pocket. Joe Aarons would make his profit on some earlier agreement.

It was no one's business to protect Sally's interests.

In the entrance hall at Romano's the "Mainwaring

Sisters" made quite a sensation. Sally's gift for putting on her clothes had met Mr. Perry's gift for selecting them for her. Her high evening dress, and becoming hat, her lace and ermine cape, were fashion's last words. It was only her face that was incongruous; it was pale, and her eyes were shy. But her hair flamed in the badly lit entrance to the restaurant, its copper burnish drew all eyes. She was not an habitué, she looked strange and very young. Every man stared, but no one spoke to the two girls until Edgar Levi hurried up to them.

"Miss Mainwaring?" he asked.

And Elfrida answered for them both. She had been there before; she was disappointed when Edgar said:

"We're supping upstairs. I've just been getting a table. Tom will be here in a moment. Where's Joe? Do you want to take anything off?"

Sally had not spoken. He stared at her, but all the happy familiarities that were ready to rise to his lips were damped by her silence. She made no movement to follow his or Elfrida's lead, for she had just seen Lord Kidderminster! And Kiddie, in the act of taking off his coat, now saw her. The flush and smile that met his recognition transformed her.

"Why! do you know Kiddie?" asked Edgar Levi, in astonishment. It seemed as if Tom Peters was already too late. But, of course, if she knew Kiddie, it explained her dress. Edgar had realized, at the first glance, that it was not explained by her salary.

"Oh, yes."

Tom came through the swing door at that moment, with Joe Aarons close at his heels. They greeted the girls, and Kiddie asked impulsively:

"Hullo, Peters, what are you doing? Sup with me, won't you? I'm alone."

"Sorry I can't, my lord, I'm afraid I'm booked up. I've got a little party myself upstairs. Can't you join us?"

Kiddie signified his acceptance.

"Why not?" But his eyes never left Sally.

"Edgar, tell them to lay another place," said Tom.

At supper Sally had her first formal introduction to Lord Kidderminster. She was amused when she found out that he did not know who she was, that "Miss Sarita Mainwaring" was not associated in his mind with the "Sally Snape" whom his cousin had run over, and whom he had helped to apprentice to a dressmaker's business.

Sally chattered it all out to him in the first five minutes. She had never felt so completely at home with anybody.

"I almost thought you didn't know me that day on the steps of the Majestic. I suppose I looked ill and different when I came to Curzon Street. I was only just out of the hospital." She had a sudden memory and misgiving of her Epping Forest clothes, and her hat.

"Well, you were limping, you know," he said awkwardly. "You had a crutch."

He did not know what to say; his was never a ready wit. He had wanted to meet Sally again, ever since he had met her on the steps of the Majestic. Even to-night he had been thinking of her, wondering if he should meet her. It was firmly in his mind that his acquaintance with her dated from some theatrical party. He had searched vainly for her in the choruses of Roma's, the Crystal, the Millennium. Now, suddenly, it all flashed through his memory.

At first he had not wanted to give the fifty pounds. Dolly was always rushing him. Then this girl had limped into the room, and he had changed his mind quickly. Colonel Fellowes had chaffed him about it two or three days afterwards at the club. But the impression Sally had made then was vague and fleeting.

"At the Majestic I wondered where we had met. I oughtn't to have forgotten. I don't see such pretty girls every day."

She blushed. It was quite a remarkable thing to do, and it drew the eyes of the table to her.

"What's he been saying to you, Miss Mainwaring?" Edgar called out, in one of his bursts of tactlessness. "Don't you let him say things to shock you."

Kiddie's disgusted expression and Tom Peters' frown checked him.

"A glass of wine with you?" he went on affably.

Sally ignored him.

Tom began to talk to Sally soon after that. But she remembered his importance, and all that Mr. Aarons had said about him. Her shyness and self-consciousness came back and she answered him in monosyllables. Yes, she "liked her song," and she "loved dancing," and this was her first engagement, and she was quite satisfied with it.

This was a conversational *impasse* for Tom. He had never before met any one, in the musical or theatrical profession, who was quite satisfied with his or her engagement! Edgar, whose sense of humour was the only drawback to his position, came to his master's assistance and asked:

"Don't you want to play Juliet?"

"Who's Juliet?" was the answer that nonplussed even him.

It was a strange supper, hardly merry. Joe was full of anxiety, and Tom apparently imperturbable towards him. Elfrida was shrill and flirtatious, and, after a sufficiency of champagne, Edgar, to use his own vernacular, "took her on." It was not an edifying sight, the love-making of Mr. Edgar Levi and Elfrida. It bored Tom, and disgusted Lord Kidderminster. Kiddie became the hereditary legislator under its influence, and remembered

his distinguished ancestry. He got up to take leave of the party. Tom rose with him.

"I want to ask you something," he said to Lord Kidderminster.

The two men moved nearer the balcony. The heavy aroma of food ascended to them, and it was laden with smoke, dense with some more acrid perfume. As their eyes grew accustomed to the strangely disposed lights, and the stranger shadows that fell, they saw that all the tables were full, and there were women at all of them, more women than men; stage women, old and experienced, quite young girls, and grades between the two; but all of them garish, flamboyant, redolent of the world behind the footlights. There ascended to their ears laughter, loud, shrill, artificial, theatrical, a note of forced gaiety. To be on edge and keen, quite human and sentient, in face of this, meant to feel pain. That poignant pain came to Kiddie; a strange experience for him.

"Let's get out of this," he said.

Tom followed him down the stairs and into the hall.

"You want to ask me something?" he said, as he was being helped into his coat.

"Oh, any time will do; there is no hurry about it."

"How are those girls going to get home?" Kiddie went on abruptly, à propos of nothing.

"I don't know. It was about that I wanted to speak to you. Do you want me to give her an engagement? Of course, when I went to see her to-night, I had no idea your lordship and she . . ."

"Don't make any mistake, I know nothing of the girl."

"Oh! I am sorry; it was only her get-up, you know, her dress?"

Kiddie paused, his voice was quite harsh.

"What was the matter with her dress?"

"Nothing; it is very good, and that ermine cloak! She hasn't drawn more than five pounds a week at the Grecian, I should think," Tom added reflectively.

Kiddie's face flushed.

"You needn't make any of your damned insinuations. Her dress was simple enough so far as I saw, she hadn't a scrap of jewellery. Hush! Here they come."

Edgar and Elfrida were still playing their ugly game; their eyes bright, their shoulders touching, whispering to each other. Joe Aarons followed, looking tired and disappointed. He had been in business all day, he wanted the rest and peace of his Maida Vale home, his snug place by his Miriam's side. And he was not sure Edgar had been right. Tom Peters had said nothing to him, not a word! He could not be certain the money he had spent on Sally had been well laid out. He seldom speculated in business. It was very well to succeed at an East End music-hall, but Tom was so quick, and Tom had said nothing. Joe was full of doubts and misgivings.

Sally was looking completely happy; her eyes shone in her pale face. Lord Kidderminster felt that strange pain again as he looked at her, he did not know what it meant, but it impelled him to her side.

"Can I see you home?" he said in a low voice. He did not want to part with her just yet. He hated Elfrida and Edgar and all her entourage.

"I live with Miss Carthew; she and I are going home together," she answered happily, raising her candid eyes to his. "But it's very kind of you. . . ."

Edgar heard; it was wonderful what quick hearing and perception he had.

"Oh, no, Miss Carthew is not going home with you. "She's coming to my rooms first, it's much too early to go home. We're going to have a game of poker for an

hour; she's just been telling me she loves the game, haven't you, Miss Carthew?" He winked at her, and his wink travelled round to Tom Peters. "Come on, Tom," he urged, "we'll make a night of it. We can get some of the other fellows. . . ."

Kiddie's invitation now was more urgent.

"You will let me drive you home. Don't go with them," he said in a hurried whisper.

Sally hesitated, hardly understanding, looking to Elfrida for guidance.

"Oh, you go on," she said impatiently. "I've got my key, I'm going to have a bit of fun. I haven't played poker for years."

It was all quickly settled, it seemed to arrange itself. The swing doors had revolved, and Sally was outside the hot restaurant. The air came chill, and she gathered her ermine cloak closely round her. Kiddie was by her side, vaguely wishing she were not so finely dressed. His brougham was standing there, now he was helping her in. It all seemed very strange. She had been in a carriage only once before; it was that eventful evening when Mr. Perry had driven her from the theatre. And she had not been so happy then, not nearly so happy. Her clothes, for instance, were all right to-night.

Kiddie tried to take her hand, but she pulled it away from him.

"I didn't mean any harm," he said, rather ashamed of himself.

She laughed:

"Isn't it stupid of me? But I do hate being touched."

"Not by any one who is fond of you?"

"You haven't had time to get fond of me."

"Haven't I? That's all you know. It began in Dolly's drawing-room."

Sally's thoughts travelled back.

"It was good of you to pay all that money for me," she said softly.

Kiddie took her hand again, encouraged by that softness, and her gratitude to him made her leave it there.

"It was so strange to me. I felt so strange in that drawing-room. And Lady Dorothea and you are so good. I know I ought to have stayed in Brook Street, but there wasn't enough to do; and I wanted all the things I tried on, and all the things the other ladies had on — those that came to shop, I mean. Sixteen shillings a week seemed so little, I was satisfied with fourteen and threepence at the factory. I don't know how it came about I got so discontented. I think it was my holiday that did it, Brighton and that beautiful sea. . . . Do you think it was ungrateful of me to leave Brook Street?"

But Kiddie still held her hand in his; it was quite a small hand, soft too. Kiddie had a sort of ache in his heart, one to which he was not used. There was nothing provocative about Sally, he forgot all his muddled ethics:

"You don't mean to say you ever lived on fourteen and threepence a week?"

She told him how it had been spent, and how well it sufficed. The interest of the story was absorbing, even dramatic, when it came to the saving for the plumed hat worn at Epping, the one that Kiddie had seen her in at Curzon Street. He was so sorry for her, yet the story was told without any exaggeration, just as it all happened.

"I was quite happy until I went to Brook Street. I thought I had never been happy until I got there, but I know now. And Mr. Perry only liked me because I showed things off well," she said, moved to pathos by Kiddie's sympathy, but knowing nothing so pathetic as Mr. Perry's want of interest.

The drive seemed a short one. Sally had never talked to any one so freely before. Lord Kidderminster had a feeling that all these strange things she told him were familiar to him, that always he had known of this poor pretty girl, half starved and working, whilst he was living in the lap of luxury, with so much more than he wanted. When the brougham stopped, it was to him as the awakening from a dream.

Elfrida and Sally lived in Gooch Place, since their engagement at the Grecian. Their room was small and high up, the house was of the usual lodging-house type. When Sally got out of the brougham Kiddie followed her:

"Can't I come in and talk to you? Your friend won't be home for a long time."

"Oh, no, please don't!" They were alone in the grey, sordid street. The dirty door-step, the narrow entry, the close lodging-house air that filled it were all ignored.

"Please let my hand go. Please don't want to come in. It was kind of you to see me home. Our landlady is very strict; we're not allowed visitors. . . ."

She poured it all out breathlessly. She had enjoyed her evening; now she wanted to be alone to think of it.

Lord Kidderminster saw that she was in earnest.

"But I want to see you again. When am I to see you again?"

"I don't know."

"Will you come out to supper with me to-morrow night, if I come to the Grecian?"

"Oh, yes." She was quite eager in her acceptance; it was something to which she could look forward. The invitation wound up this beautiful evening fitly. "Do go now," she urged. "I want to shut the door. Mrs. Jones will hear us talking, and come down; you don't know how fussy she is."

"All right."

But still he lingered. He wanted to ask her for a kiss; but she looked anxious, listening, *distraite*. His sensations were confused; she had caught his fancy, he did not know where he was with her. He told himself he must keep his head.

"Until to-morrow, then."

"Oh, yes, till to-morrow."

Now she was alone. She shut the door after him, carefully and quietly, leaving it on the latch for Elfrida. But the narrow stairs, with their worn and shabby carpets, and the dim gaslight in the mean house, were all transfigured and golden to her. To-night she had learnt something; the knowledge had been coming slowly all this time, but to-night it flamed into reality, into certainty. She was pretty; that was why. . . .

At the thoughts that thronged, the remembrances she had, she blushed, grew hot, uncomfortable, and put them away from her. Men had always wanted to touch her, and kiss her, but she had always hated that sort of thing. Yet she grew very red, all by herself in the narrow, ill-smelling passage, when the door closed on Kiddie. She thought she would not have minded if Kiddie had kissed her. And, as she ran swiftly upstairs, away from this thought, she was glad she was pretty, very, very glad.

There was the flare from an irregular gas jet in the room she shared with Elfrida. By the light of it she looked at herself in the fine clothes that Mr. Perry had lent her. A misgiving struck her, the misgiving that always struck her when she saw herself reflected, and kept her strangely humble. Could red hair and snub nose, pale face and green eyes, be beautiful? It was not her taste, she admired nothing she saw in the glass, except the hat and the ermine cape. She sighed as she looked, for she knew the hat and

the cape must go back to-morrow, and only the face and the hair would be left. But Lord Kidderminster had admired her unmistakably, and the great Tom Peters had smiled at her. Edgar Levi, and the men in the entrance lobby, had eyed her in the same way.

"It isn't the clothes, it is me," she said to herself. "They do like my face; they think me good-looking."

She undressed, combing out her long thick hair, unplaiting it, letting it run through her fingers, then she plaited it again, for the night, in one long thick rope. She went to bed as happy as a child, and was asleep almost before her head touched the pillow. It was not Sally's way to think. It seemed to her to-night that she had been dowered with a rich gift, her gift of beauty. She cuddled it within her arms, slept happily with it as a child with a new doll. She had neither fear nor misgiving. She was of the slums, this child who slept on her hard pillow in the Gooch Place attic, with her hair like a glory about her, a smile on her sweet lips, no fear in her heart, and no misgivings.

For many nights she slept like this.

CHAPTER XI

THE Romano supper-party was on Wednesday. Thursday morning Edgar Levi was at Maiden Lane betimes; twelve o'clock was betimes for Edgar, and he was chaffing Joe Aarons in his familiar way:

"Well! how's the missus and the kids? I'll tell 'em how you've been going on, and about Miss Mainwaring's clothes! You've kept it pretty close, but we can't allow this sort of thing in our theatrical agent, it isn't playing the game; pilfering, I call it, petty pilfering! Now, what has she been costing you? What's the price? That's what we want to know. And how far it's gone. Mind you, I respect you for it, but how about the Act? I bet she isn't eighteen yet. How old is she?"

"She's between seventeen and eighteen."

Joe was overjoyed at seeing Edgar; he had slept badly and feared he had made a mistake. Miriam had comforted him, telling him she was sure he never made mistakes. She knew no details, but her blind and perfect faith was better for him than an intelligent knowledge would have been. He came to the office feeling more hopeful, already he had astutely summed up as assets, Tom Peters' broken engagement and Lord Kidderminster's attentions.

He took Edgar's chaff well; he could be quite as coarse as the other. It did not hurt Sally Snape, who was not there to hear it, nor his Miriam, who would never interfere with business. It was business to meet Edgar on his own ground, to be interested in the details of last night's orgie,

to listen with apparent gusto to the description of Elfrida drunk, and the whole scene of debauchery in Edgar's rooms. But he was glad when this part of the business was over.

"How about terms?" Edgar said suddenly. "You've got some sort of an agreement with them, Elfrida tells me."

"Two years, my boy," answered Joe, triumphantly; he was on his own ground now.

"At three pounds a week?"

"I see you've wormed it out of her."

"That's what I took her home for, not . . ." But the brutal, unvarnished expression of his views need not be repeated.

"Well, when you know the price you haven't got much further," said Joe.

"She can't sing."

"I never said she could."

"There are scores better dancers."

"Well! I'll give you that in."

"She looks delicate."

"She's as strong as a horse."

"But she might break down."

"As, according to you she can't sing, and she can't dance, it don't matter if she does break down."

"Now, don't be nasty; you know I'm trying to do you a good turn."

"Or yourself?"

"What a temper you've got! If I'd had your temper I shouldn't be where I am for a month."

"Now then, Edgar, leave off fooling. You want the girls, Tom wants them. What about me and my agreement?"

"What did you reckon to make out of it?"

"Five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred devils! How much a week, I mean?"

"Twallin paid me twelve guineas."

"For how long?"

"As long as I wanted them to go on."

"Bosh! until the boys got tired of the song, about four weeks at the outside!"

"What's the good of talking like that? What will he give?"

"She's got to learn her business."

"I paid Job Macher a fortune to teach it her."

"Oh! I heard about that, too. Twelve lessons for five guineas. Three weeks out of work, and you paid 'em thirty shillings."

"I see you didn't waste your time last night," Joe retorted, sarcastically.

Edgar's rejoinder matched his detail at the beginning of the interview. He prided himself on his skill at repartee, and, certainly, no one could ever say he erred through reticence.

Nevertheless, the negotiations took some time. It was midday before Sally Snape's agreement with Joe Aarons had found its way to Edgar Levi's pocket. Joe had not got his five hundred pounds, but, needless to say, he had never expected it. He had something over five hundred per cent, nevertheless, on the money he had expended on Sally's education, and a free hand to get anything more that he could in the way of commission.

"We shan't interfere with you," Edgar said, "we do our business our own way; you can do yours your own way. We shall give her a rising salary, and you can have a commission on it if you make it right with her. But I've got a voice in the salary list, so I hope you'll remember me."

This was at lunch, after the bargain had been struck, and a bottle of champagne and his success had made Edgar

expansive. He had had a good morning, for the agreement had been secured at twenty-five per cent under the price Tom Peters had authorized him to give. That twenty-five per cent was his bonus. Now he was getting a lien on Sally Snape's future, and he had no doubt that was a good thing. Sally Snape was a "flyer," he knew that. He was altogether hilarious and familiar. By the time they parted, Joe felt that Edgar Levi had got all the best of him, and his pleasure in his own good bargain was dashed by the consideration of how much better the other's had been. Then his thoughts flew to his home, from which they were never long absent, and he pictured his clever Abe, old enough to be down here with him, circumventing such as Edgar Levi.

"He'll hold his own with them," he thought. "They won't get the best of him; *he'll* know how to deal with them."

This prospect helped him to accept equably what he already began to consider his own failure as a dealer. Edgar had tempted him where he knew him to be most vulnerable, his need of ready money. A weekly income is all very well, and of a weekly income from Sally, Joe was already assured. But she might fall ill, or get tired of work, or fail to please a strangely fickle public. And it was October; school bills were due or over-due, money for doctors, clothes, and rent seemed to be wanted all at once, and he hated touching his investments. Over-investing was Joe Aarons' one extravagance.

It had been agreed that Sally was to know nothing for the present of her changed circumstances. It was necessary, for instance, that she should finish her week's engagement at the Grecian. The next phase in her career was undecided yet, even by Tom Peters. She might not please a West End audience as she had pleased an East End one,

and, at the moment, Lord Kidderminster was an unknown quantity.

"Somebody pays for her clothes," Tom had said sapiently. "I don't think his lordship was telling me lies, he *hopes* to pay for them; we've got to find out who does. That's your job."

All the dirty work, or the dirtiest work, of the unsavoury profession was supposed to be Edgar's share. Edgar had not suspected Joe Aarons of the lavish expenditure Sally's toilette displayed, but he had been unable to find out anything from Elfrida; Elfrida could not tell what she did not know.

Sally felt like Cinderella when Lord Kidderminster met her the next night at the stage-door of the Grecian. She had punctiliously taken back the clothes to Mr. Perry. Mr. Perry had questioned her kindly, had called her "child," and asked about her success with Mr. Peters. She could not translate into words that she knew Mr. Peters thought her worth looking at; and something, she did not know what, kept her from mentioning Lord Kidderminster's name, even when Mr. Perry told her she ought to get some nice young man to pay for her clothes. The old admiration and respect for Mr. Perry was with her as she lingered to see him sell extraordinary French models to ordinary English dowds. He caught her watching him, and said condescendingly:

"Don't go, Miss Snape, don't hurry away. I've got something I want you to try on."

And presently she tried on a wonderful sable stole, and revelled in its softness and warmth, and she saw her pale face and bright hair crowned with a sable toque with gold aigrette and jewelled clasp. Again she hugged that new good gift; she was beautiful, beautiful. She wanted Mr. Perry to see it, they were pleading eyes she raised to his.

"Now, you be a good girl," he said, "and you'll get your chance; you mark my words, you'll get your chance. Don't throw it away, that's all. . . ." He impressed upon her not to throw away her chances.

After she had gone, he said to Miss Baines:

"She'll find some one to look after her presently. You see if she don't; that red hair of hers will do it, and her figure. My word! she'll be a good customer then."

"I think we are getting rather too many of that sort as it is," Miss Baines replied, with a toss of her head.

"It's all right as long as we don't give them credit," he yawned indifferently, as he sauntered off.

Lord Kidderminster found her black hat and shabby dress quite as attractive as the smart clothes. He liked Sally's welcoming smile; and he behaved very well, on the whole, when he realized that Sally had taken it for granted that Elfrida was included in the invitation to supper.

"We have neither of us had any dinner and we are awfully hungry," she began.

Kiddie was glad Edgar Levi was hovering about; he made an adaptable fourth. The four of them went to Frascati's, and had first oysters and then steak. They drank beer, and the atmosphere of the music-hall seemed to be with them all the time. There was less glamour about Sally to-night; as to conversation, there seemed give-and-take between her, Edgar, and Elfrida. She was more amenable to the beer than she had been to the champagne. The adventure began to assume its proper proportions. She was a "ripping gal" this evening, not an houri nor a goddess, just a pretty girl. Edgar had the geniality of the Jew, and, when he was on his mettle, could behave decently. They were all very merry; innuendoes, which passed by Sally, hit their mark with Elfrida, and were fully appreciated.

But Sally could laugh, she was happy, and her new toy was a real possession. There was nothing deeper than the surface to perplex or scare her. She was hungry, and was eating and drinking in this fine room, she saw that both the men knew she was pretty. Her laugh rang out gay and infectious; she was a little beside herself, and so less silent than usual. She was sorry when supper was ended. But Elfrida grew cross at the end, and said she would not go again to Edgar's rooms; she was tired, and wanted an early night. It was not likely she appreciated playing second fiddle. She began to realize that the "carroty factory girl," as she called Sally contemptuously, was cutting her out. She insisted on breaking up the party.

It suited Edgar's ends very well; he had his plan of campaign quickly cut and dried. It was the possibility of this invitation to supper that had set him loitering to-night, apparently after Elfrida Carthew. Now he wanted to get rid of the girls; he wanted a word, of course, an impromptu word, with Lord Kidderminster.

It all fell out as he had intended. Kiddie lent the girls the brougham; it was a fine night, and Edgar offered to walk a bit with him. Walking was not much in Edgar's line, but Kiddie had always used his limbs.

"She's a pretty girl," Edgar began tentatively, after he had offered Kiddie a cigar and lighted his own, ogling a daughter of pleasure who passed into the restaurant alone. "A devilish pretty girl, I call her, and that laugh of hers . . ." He imitated it, a startlingly strange echo.

"Don't do that," said Kiddie sharply. And they walked on a few paces, talking of indifferent things.

"We're thinking of putting up 'In Far Cathay' again," Edgar said after a pause, a pause in which he did some rapid thinking. "Tom has given Hyams the music to

overhaul. What is your view? He's got two or three ripping new numbers."

Kiddie seemed indifferent.

"I wish I could get Tom to try some new blood. Kittie Golden is all very well, and so is Maudie. I like the Skinner girls, and, of course, we've got a good chorus, but we want something new."

"Georgie Lute?" suggested Kiddie disingenuously.

"Going on at the Roma."

But Kiddie was a child in Edgar's hands. Before they had got to Oxford Circus he found himself suggesting that Tom should give Miss Mainwaring a chance. Ere they had reached Piccadilly the subject was being thoroughly threshed out. It seemed that the remounting of "In Far Cathay" was only in the air at present—Tom funked the expense. Kiddie was enlightened as to the cost of dressing such a performance. He heard of the author's heavy fees, and was told, incidentally, that the lyrists and musicians had also to be paid. Then his imagination was kindled by the suggestion of seeing Sarita Mainwaring in a Letty Lind part. Sally, on Edgar's lips, lost more of her illusion, but none of her attraction. He was a picturesque talker, and Kiddie was no stoic. Edgar gave Kiddie a drink at the very bohemian Club that he honoured with his membership, and Lord Kidderminster, before he went to bed, had practically promised to put up the money for "In Far Cathay," on the condition that Tom would give Miss Mainwaring a chance in the part formerly played by Miss Letty Lind.

"We've been half the evening without a fourth," growled Tom, when Edgar turned up, something after one A.M., at Mr. Jupe's rooms in Dover Street, as fresh as paint. "I should like to know what you have been doing with yourself?"

"Working for you, as usual," he answered gaily. "Can I cut in? Who's been winning?"

But the position was quite clear to him.

Jerry Jupe was Tom's solicitor, very sharp in his profession; out of it a sensualist, a gambler, wholly without self-control. Tom paid him handsomely, and won back every emolument from him quite regularly.

Jupe was very good-looking, in a sleek, plebeian way. He knew how clever he was at his office, and never grasped how foolish he was out of it. Tom flattered his vanity, gave him the freedom of "behind the scenes," and sometimes told him, as if enviously, what a success he was with the girls! Jerry never resisted any temptation. He was still a comparatively young man, and, but for Tom, who was considered his most valuable client, he might have been a successful one.

They were playing bridge at shilling points when Edgar came in. The other two guests were racing-men. No one was quite sober but Tom. He had won, and so had his partners; there was not as much in it as there ought to have been, however. Edgar was his favourite partner, but Edgar had not been there. Now the party was on the point of breaking up.

"Blaines wants to go," Tom said, still sitting at the table, shuffling the cards about with his dark-palmed, croupier-like hand. "I don't want to go to bed yet. Why don't you and Jupe take us on, Venables? Just for three rubbers. Best of three."

"Yes, why not?" said Edgar.

Venables thought he'd rather play with Tom against Edgar and Jupe. But Edgar demurred. He said he was such a rotten bad player; it wasn't fair on Jupe. He didn't mind losing Tom a rubber or two; Tom could afford it.

"I can't afford it, but I don't mind," interposed Tom.

Still, he "didn't care who he played with," he said, but he "liked a match, there was more fun in a match."

It was finally arranged, of course, that Tom should play with Edgar. Edgar made a great many mistakes. Jupe and Venables saw that he was no player. Yet, strangely enough, all his mistakes proved to be lucky ones. If he called "no trumps" without an ace, his partner had three. If he announced hearts with four, there were six small ones in Tom's hand.

They won all three rubbers, and then they agreed to a change of partners. But Tom suddenly remembered he had an early rehearsal.

"You might have reminded me," he said, plaintively, to Edgar, who admitted his carelessness. Edgar ate some sandwiches and drank a glass of port, with engaging abandonment to his appetite, and was called to accompany Tom on his way home, whilst his mouth was still full. He hurried away without completing his impromptu supper.

"All right, Jupe; thanks, old fellow. I'll take another with me. Thanks for a pleasant evening. Sorry you were the victim. But Tom is a lucky devil. Wait a minute, Tom, I must get my coat on. Can't you see I've got my mouth full? What a chap you are!" But he followed him into the night.

Tom Peters had a fine house in Berkeley Square; Edgar's humble lodgings were in Curzon Street.

"You played that last hand very badly," Tom began; "we ought to have made at least two more tricks."

"I've played one hand bally well to-night, I can tell you. Lord Kidderminster is going to pay for the production of 'In Far Cathay.'"

He stopped for comment, but ostensibly to light his cigarette.

"What!"

Even Tom forgot his habitual nonchalance for the moment but quickly went on: "Nonsense," he said, "what's that nonsense you are saying?"

"It's not nonsense, it's sound common sense, and business, too. You'll have the Verandah on your hands in a fortnight; you're losing a thousand a week there now. Kiddie is gone on that girl, head over heels, I don't know nor care if he's first, second, or third with her, nor how far they've got; but I saw how it was, and I struck while the iron was hot. You might say 'thank you' to a fellow. She isn't Letty Lind, but there's something about her that reminds one of Letty. If you'll let Sarita Mainwaring play Letty Lind's part, Kidderminster will put up the brass. . . ."

"You are clever, there's no denying it." Tom had to admit it, however grudgingly. "'In Far Cathay'? But why 'In Far Cathay'?"

"To tell you the truth, I couldn't think of anything else at the moment. And there he sat making eyes at her, and I sat thinking what we could get out of it, and then it struck me all of a sudden. What's a premium, or anything we could ask him for, to put her into 'The Boys from Burton' compared to this? We shall get a run for nothing."

Tom had no more to say.

"Well, here we are. My wife will be wondering what's become of me. So long. . . . I'll see you in the morning."

"I suppose I'll get a bit out of it?" Edgar was never tired; he wanted to linger even now.

"Don't you get a bit out of everything?" Tom answered, drily.

Edgar laughed.

"Don't I earn it?" he retorted.

"Good night."

"Good night."

Lord Kidderminster was at the Grecian on Friday night and Saturday. But on the first occasion Elfrida was sick, and Sally could not be persuaded to sup out without her; and, on the second, it seemed she had promised Johnny to have tripe and onions with him. Sally, up to this period of her life, had rarely broken a promise, or failed to keep an appointment. Besides, she wanted to sup with Johnny, who had something very important to tell her, as he found time to whisper. And he bribed her with the tripe that she loved. She told Lord Kidderminster she wasn't dressed to go out with him.

"Another night then, Miss Sarita. You'll give me another evening?" He knew it was with the stage-carpenter that she was keeping an appointment. Johnny touched his hat to him, and called him "my lord," waiting respectfully whilst he detained Sally.

"Oh, yes, of course. I'll have supper with you some other night, *any* other night; but now I've promised Johnny."

"His lordship is taken with you, Sal," said Johnny solemnly, when at last she was free, and they walked away together.

Sally smiled. "Yes, that he is. He's made Mr. Peters engage me. This is my last night here."

"I know," answered Johnny gloomily. "He's up to no good."

"I can take care of myself," laughed Sally, with a toss of her head. "I like him, he's a nice fellow; but he won't get anything out of me."

She felt quite safe, and happy, and exhilarated. Life was going very pleasantly. She was leaving the halls and going on the regular stage, as Miss Rugeley wished. Mr. Levi told her she was going to have six pounds a week and all her dresses found for her. She would have

been even happier, but that Elfrida was sulky and injured and altogether impossible to please, because Mr. Peters had not offered *her* an engagement at the Verandah. That was the only drawback.

"I'm going to move my room. I'm not going on living with her. Mr. Levi is going to help me to find a clean little place of my own, near the theatre. He thinks I'd be just as well alone a bit, if I can stand it. He says I'll have a lot of work to do. I'm going back to Job Macher for more lessons, and then there'll be rehearsals, singing *and* dancing, and my dresses to see to."

"It's all very worldly," said Johnny Doone solemnly.

"Worldly! My!" she turned to look at him. "Why, what's come to you, Johnny Doone?" she cried.

It all came out over supper, over the plate of tripe in the stuffy little eating-house. Johnny had "found salvation"; that was what he wanted to tell Sally about. And he wanted her to be saved too. At least, he had wanted that, until he heard she was going to get six pounds a week, and then, of course, he saw it was no good. But he used the words he had been taught, and pleaded with her, even if it was in a half-hearted manner.

"I've always been fond of you, Sal. I've never so much as looked at another girl. I know you're altogether too grand for me, but they'd make you a captain. . . ."

"Oh, go away with you! Me a captain; I look like it, don't I? And in the Salvation Army, too! You don't know what you're talking about. You don't mean to say you're leaving the Grecian, giving up good work and good pay?"

"I've got my soul to think of, my immortal soul, Sal."

"Not you; we haven't got no immortal souls. And if we have, what does it matter? Tell you what it is, Johnny. You mayn't know, but I know it. I've always

known it . . . you're lazy, that's what it is; you don't want to work. You'll march about with a banner, just so long as you feel inclined, then you'll flop down, and you'll think you're praying. But you won't be; you'll be resting, resting. You're bone lazy — bone," she repeated with contempt. "Praying! there's work for a man!" She threw this at him viciously.

They fought over supper, it was almost like old times. Johnny talked of "grace" and the giving up of temptation. Sally lashed him with her tongue. She told him his boasted conversion would land him in a workhouse. He warned her solemnly of the fate of light women. He used the jargon he had been taught, it came easy to him already. Sally had no fears for herself or her future, she was hardly full-grown yet. But Johnny was her great friend, and she had been proud of his late industry and steadiness. She did not want to marry him, she did not want to marry any one. But all the time she had been at the Grecian she had been glad he had been there, working and steady, and always at hand.

"You with a peaked cap and a banner!" she repeated contemptuously.

"It's better nor being a kept woman," he retorted sullenly.

But the words missed their meaning for her.

She went out to lunch with Kiddie a few days after this. It was at a little quiet restaurant off the Strand, and they had a serious talk. It was nice to have found a friend now that she had lost Johnny. For Johnny, unmoved by argument, had actually joined the Salvation Army, and wore the cap and red jersey she despised.

She talked about her new part to Kiddie, and her fears lest she should fail to please a West End audience. And her part in "In Far Cathay" was the one in which Miss

Letty Lind had made her great name and success. Sally had never seen the great one, but she knew of her tradition.

Kiddie was thoroughly sympathetic; he told her he knew she would be "rippin'." He was going to have a front stall, and would clap when she came on. Kiddie became more and more enthralled. Sally's childishness, innocence, ease, held him as no arts would have done. He fetched her in the brougham, and took her to her lessons with Job. He talked to Job about her progress, but Job would not let him be present at the lessons.

Edgar Levi, no less than Tom, and the whole entourage, was busy with the new production; but Edgar found time to run up to Gooch Place, and to condemn it root and branch.

"A nice clean little flat, that's what you want."

Then he proceeded to find one for her. He was very clever. He got rid of Elfrida, finding a place for her in one of Tom's travelling companies. It was the one that was going out to South Africa.

"It's a bit far," he agreed with her, "but think of the chances you'll have, and next to no competition."

Ursula Rugeley, when Sally went to see her on Sunday, was very glad to hear she was separating herself from Elfrida. Ursula had never approved of the flighty, yellow-headed girl as a companion for Sally. But she had wisely said nothing, she did not want to "put ideas into Sally's head." There were certain ideas that never seemed to enter there. Ursula had little distrust of human nature, but Sally had none.

"Does Mr. Levi think you will be better in a flat than in a nice boarding-house?" she asked anxiously.

"I must practise my singing; Lord Kidderminster is going to pay for lessons for me."

There was nothing to startle the old maid in hearing of Lord Kidderminster's generosity. She did not read penny novelettes or melodramatic fiction, and in the world she frequented there were many philanthropists who paid for sewing machines, and type-writers, mangles, and other implements of toil. Why should not Lord Kidderminster, or any other, help Sally? Ursula, who prided herself on her broad-mindedness, had not even a word of warning for her protégée. She was very proud of her good looks, her improved speech, and pretty manners.

"I should have been nowhere without you," Sally said, in a rare burst of feeling. The gratitude was always there, but the expression was rare.

"You've always been a good girl, an industrious, steady girl," answered Ursula, "and self-respecting. You owe most of all to yourself."

Sally was in truth quite pleased with herself. Her new toy brought her so many others. She felt that, if she had not been pretty, everybody would not be so kind to her. It was a knowledge that came to her comparatively late, but now it was definite and established. Tom smiled on her and encouraged her at rehearsal, Edgar helped her about a flat, and everything; Lord Kidderminster was her great friend, her real friend. She was seeing a great deal of him just now.

It was before the first night of "In Far Cathay" that Mr. Perry heard of this friendship. He was not dressing the play entirely; it was only recognized gradually that nobody could equal him as a theatrical costumier, that his instinct for colour was as accurate, vital, and unerring in the mass as in detail. But he had three dresses to make for Miss Golden, and all the gossip and scandal of the stage flowed to him in a continuous stream from her lips, as he lounged about the door, or sank into a

chair to superintend the fittings. He pricked up his ears when she began to talk of Miss Mainwaring.

"Ever seen her?" Miss Golden asked him. "She's not a bit good-looking . . . a snub-nosed little thing with a couple of yards of coarse red hair, and an eighteen-inch waist. I hear she hasn't any talent either. Kidderminster picked her up at one of the East End music-halls, and is having her coached for all she's worth. He's taken a flat somewhere in Victoria for her, and is producing the whole show at his own expense."

Kitty Golden was too successful to be ill-natured, and was a real beauty to boot. Kiddie did not throw his money about in the popular Verandah manner, he had never been a pal of hers, and she was not in the least jealous of the new-comer. Kitty had played lead in the new production, her popularity and her public were assured.

"She's going to sing Letty Lind's songs, and I'm told she's an absolute stick. I haven't been to a rehearsal yet, but I'm going to-morrow just to see her."

After Kitty Golden had gone, Mr. Perry called Miss Baines.

"Drop a line to Miss Snape, Miss Baines, will you, please? Tell her I have some models I want her to see."

"Miss Snape!" she exclaimed.

Miss Baines had not been present at the fitting of Miss Golden.

Mr. Perry offered no explanation, neither then, nor later on, when Miss Snape arrived, and model after model was exhibited for her edification.

Mr. Perry no longer called her "child." He treated her as if she were a customer, advising this and insisting on the other, telling her what she ought to wear, and when. Sally, impressed, bewildered, listened, hesitated, tried to explain, told her salary. Mr. Perry waved it away:

"Oh, that will be all right, Miss Snape. Your salary will soon be higher, much higher. There will be no hurry for our account. But you can't be seen in that thing"—there was immeasurable contempt in his voice—"you must have decent dresses."

Sally was innately honest as she was innately pure. But she loved soft linings and pretty frocks. She loved, too, her new flat, a furnished bedroom, sitting-room, and bathroom, in Tillery Mansions, Victoria. She was not dull or solitary in it, there was no time. There were music lessons, and dancing lessons, she had massage to make her limbs supple, she had her rehearsals, those rehearsals at which she was always tongue-tied and stupid, and she had Lord Kidderminster's society for at least one meal a day. Nearly all the girls in her company had a friend, some one who took them out for lunch or supper.

"Is Kiddie your 'boy'?" asked one of them. They nearly all had their "boys." The word implied nothing to Sally, and meant little to them. The majority of these fellow-workers of hers were "takers," not "givers." They evaded their obligations, accepting everything. It was a new world, and Sally walked in it, happy-eyed, seeing little.

Edgar was further in Kiddie's confidence than anybody else, and, in a limited sense, it was his advice that was being followed. Very little had been said, but it was understood that Kiddie was "to let her alone" until after the first night of the show. Edgar was always keen on whatever he had in hand. "In Far Cathay" was to be a success. Carpenters, property-men, Tom himself, everybody, was working at top speed, and with extraordinary energy. Isaac Hyams' new numbers were considered great. Never had so many pretty girls been in the chorus. Money was being spent lavishly; it was Kidderminster's money, but that

was an unimportant detail. Sally was not the only newcomer; there was a little French girl with whom Tom Peters was managerially infatuated, and a quartette of dancers who were expected to draw the town.

Sally grew more nervous as the first night drew near. She was entangled in a net, and although not fully realizing her position it nevertheless had its effect upon her nerves. She was wearing the clothes which Mr. Perry supplied, she was living in the flat which Edgar Levi had found for her, and she was incurring all these and other expenses on the strength of her future salary. She hated debt, and felt she was piling it up. Edgar Levi, Mr. Perry, and Lord Kidderminster told her not to worry about her rent or her dresses. But their reassurance only held whilst she was in company.

When she went to bed at night, dead tired, exhausted with the day's work, or the day's pleasure, she sometimes could not sleep for the figures that thronged. She added up the cost of the flat, and the cost of the dresses, calculating how much she could save from her salary, how long it would take her to get straight, and what she would do if she were not a success, if Tom Peters would not keep her, if she failed to please the public. She knew Kiddie would be a friend to her, she fell asleep always with that knowledge. But not without misgiving, never quite without misgiving.

She had the heart of a child, but, somewhere, dim and shadowy in the background of her ignorance and thoughtlessness, her woman's instinct was working. She liked Kiddie, enjoyed talking to him, and was grateful for his kindness and sympathy. But with him it was not merely a liking; he wanted something from her. Her instinct told her that, and she shrank from the knowledge, shutting her ears, her memory, and her intelligence.

But her sleep was dogged, her work interrupted, and

sometimes her fine food was only sawdust. That was when Kiddie looked at her, and her own eyes drooped before his.

The great day dawned at length, the day that ushered in the first performance of "In Far Cathay."

The dress rehearsal had gone execrably. The few friends of the management, and other personal intimates who had been present, had gone away wondering at Tom's folly in presenting such an obvious amateur to his fastidious public. They wondered aloud how much Lord Kidderminster had paid for the privilege of seeing the girl make a fool of herself! They laughed at his taste and his judgment, and the folly of everybody concerned in her appearance. Sally's dance, as well as her song, had been paralyzed by unfriendly faces and an unfriendly audience. She seemed to be in a position to which her merits did not entitle her. The very girls of the chorus jeered at her. Each of them felt she could have done better, and resented in her own way that Lord Kidderminster should have forced Sally undeservedly to the front.

Sally had gone back to her flat, broken-hearted, to cry the night through. Her liabilities and obligations mingled their grotesque terrors with her feeling of artistic helplessness and hopelessness. Everything served to unfit her for the ordeal of the morrow.

Her collapse at the dress rehearsal had not been without its serious effect on the principals. Tom had sworn at everybody, at Edgar most of all. Lord Kidderminster, who had been "in front," had felt his heart swell with tenderness. Never had he experienced a like feeling. He was so sorry for her, so understandingly sorry; he wanted to take her away from it all. Why the devil should she sing or dance? It was for himself he wanted her. He had been a fool. Why had he let her come here, worked for

her to come here, only to be distressed and made unhappy, poor little girl? He was impatient with the dragging play; hopelessly vulgar, stupid, and dreary, it seemed to him. Literally his heart ached with tenderness, and he failed to understand himself or his feeling. He hurried round to the stage door before the curtain fell, but Sally had already left the house. Edgar begged him not to go after her.

"Leave her alone, she'll get over it. It was only stage fright, and the want of direct encouragement. Tom is raving, running about like a bear with a sore head. But it's all right, she'll be *good;* see if she isn't."

"I don't care."

Kiddie's lips were trembling; he was quite unlike himself, having, for the moment, lost his control. "I don't care a damn if she's good or bad. Take her off altogether, if you like. She's been overworked, poor little girl. I'm going off to her. I shall take her out of town, if she'll come. You can put off the show, or get some one else. She was all to pieces. Tom, or some one, has been bullying her; I won't have it. . . ."

Edgar saw how it was with him. It was the sort of feeling he was capable of himself, although it never lasted long with him. His racial gift of sympathy came in, as well as his optimism.

"She hasn't been bullied, and she won't be bullied, trust me for that; it was only an hysterical breakdown. I've seen scores of 'em like it—all the real artists. She'll think she's an utter failure to-night, and cry her eyes out. . . ."

Again Kiddie felt that strange contraction round his heart.

"But she will pull herself together by to-morrow, and you see if she don't surprise them. She was just the same

the first night we saw her at the Grecian — paralytic; but see what happened when the boys cheered her! I'm going to get those boys."

"A *claque!*"

"You leave it to me. I promise you, you'll see something to-morrow night. But leave her alone. . . ."

Kiddie had no choice as to leaving her alone. He went to the flat, and rang and rang, but the place was in darkness, and he got no response. He went away at last, haunted by the thought of the girl, crying alone, miserable through his mistake. His feeling for her did not include at the moment any real belief in her talent. It did not seem to matter, either. Only her distress mattered, and haunted him all that long evening.

CHAPTER XII

THE curtain rose on the first night of "In Far Cathay" with commendable promptitude. Gallery and pit were crammed, stalls and boxes comparatively empty. During the opening chorus, and all through the beginning of the first act, well-dressed barbarians forced their unmannerly entrance, talking, disturbing occupants of other seats, obstructing the view of those who had put themselves to immense fatigue, and exercised immeasurable patience, to obtain it.

It was a typical first night. Every one knew his neighbour, and had brought his preconceived views of the play, with intent to expound them. When the smart young men were settled in their seats, they took pains to show that they knew the chorus by their Christian names; and they advertised their knowledge freely. One heard that "Millie" looked "thundering" well, but "Jess" had had a cold; that the "Skinner" girls had locked "Mama" in her room, so that they could give her stall to "Ernie"; and that "Gus" thought "Lily" would never appear at all, for she was so "screwed" at five o'clock this afternoon that he had the devil's own work to get her home. Ordinary *coulisse* gossip.

Ladies moved restlessly, and listened perfunctorily, saying it was not as if "In Far Carthay" were a new play. A few of them were interested in the tenor, and some spoke of the dresses. The representatives of the Press yawned, having already written the notices with a view to the

advertisement columns, leaving a few lines to be added about the reception of the piece, and the speech Mr. Peters was sure to make when it was over.

Tom always made a speech. He knew the gallery boys liked a little additional fun for their money, and they could always guy him without disturbing his serenity. He rather liked it, and thought it lucky; all his most successful productions had been booed, and universally condemned by the Press. The Press is better advised to-day. None of the leading newspapers send gentlemen of literary taste, or dramatic instinct, to criticise Tom Peters' musical comedies.

The opening chorus went well, as far as one could hear it for the late comers. The early inanities were well received, and, before Kitty Golden's first solo relieved the situation, the social spirit of the stalls and boxes provoked the enmity of the cheaper seats. But Kitty was a popular favourite, she held her place firmly, and commanded silence; so did the hero, and the leading comedian, and the lady who played up to him. The French importation was the first novelty, and she was listened to with attention. She was arch, very arch, but, nevertheless, her song fell a little flat, it touched the limit of triviality, and the silly refrain matched the silly context.

The house apparently caught cold; one could hear it clearing its throat and beginning to cough. It was an inauspicious moment for Miss Sarita Mainwaring, but it was impossible to delay her appearance.

She had passed a bad night, giving up herself and her chances as lost. She had sobbed herself to sleep about two o'clock in the morning. But then she had slept uninterruptedly for nearly eight hours. The world seemed all bright again to her when she awoke, and she had forgotten what had made her cry so last night. There were flowers

from Kiddie, with a note, saying he was fetching her for lunch at one, and afterwards she was to have a spin in the motor; she was to do no work that day. There was also a note from Edgar, saying how clever she had been last night not to let herself go, it was much better to surprise them to-night. But he thought she had been very good all the same.

"Very good!"

It was extraordinary, she thought she had been hopelessly bad. She was bewildered, but quite ready to believe it was true. She was to do no work, but, before she dressed for lunch, she practised her song and a few steps of her dance in front of the glass in her room. In her morning gaiety and renewed spirits, her voice came back, and, in her petticoat slip, with her hair hanging down, she looked charming, and, what was more important, she knew she looked charming. She executed quite a spontaneous, original little dance of her own, and felt as assured of success to-night as she had been of failure last evening.

Fortunately, she remained in this mood all day, through the gay little luncheon, and the sprint to Richmond. Kiddie hardly let her out of his sight. He praised her all the time, in accordance with Edgar's suggestion. Edgar came up to the flat at tea-time, and he too praised her, predicting a *furore*. She was amazed again to hear how good she had been at rehearsal, and she promised herself that if they thought her good then, they should think her a lot better to-night.

The Miss Sarita Mainwaring who made her bow to a West End audience, for the first time, was none but Sally Snape, gay, careless, and self-assured. The gallery cheered her before she opened her mouth; Edgar's claque was there. She gave them her familiar, welcoming, nod and smile. It seemed to say, "See here, what I'm going to do for you;

hold your noise till I show you." What voice she had was as clear as a bell, every word was heard, every note told. Then her dancing! For sheer grace and spontaneity, inspired by an obvious personal enjoyment and delight, nothing like it had been seen in London for years. She danced and she danced, and the house, after the first curious silence and surprise, rose at her, shouted for her, applauded without restraint or reserve. She was one with them, her feet never stopped. It was not a dance she was doing, she was the very incarnation of the Dance-Spirit. All the time she danced she was smiling, singing the chorus of her little song under her breath, her red hair was whirling round, and she was tossing it off her face with that little familiar movement, and . . .

Well! It was the greatest success Tom had ever had. Sally's dance was *the* moment of the first act; but it had put the audience in good humour, and the fate of the revival was never in doubt after that.

Tom patted her on the back when she came off, and said she was "a good girl." Edgar boasted: "What did I tell you?" Kiddie's face in the stalls looked very white. And from a pittite, in an incongruous red jersey and peaked cap, came clapping, which lasted even after the resounding applause had died away.

The second act showed her already an established favourite; everything she did was encored. The end of the piece saw her in a whirl of smiling faces, congratulatory words and cordial handshakes. She seemed to be surrounded, hemmed in by people telling her she was a genius, inviting her out, and generally making much of her. They were captivated by her ingenuous pleasure in what she had done. She was so gaily, so childishly, glad she had danced well, and been applauded.

She had supper with dozens of people; it seemed to her

that all the world was there. It was the author's party, and he, as well as every one else, said the nicest possible things to her.

It is difficult to distinguish the "author" of a musical comedy from the man who composed the music, the man who wrote the lyrics, the man who provided some of the occasional numbers, and the man who wrote the others. But they were all alike in their kindness to Sally. They all talked at once, and they all drank at once, generously. Kitty Golden was there, and two of the quartette. Sally could never quite disentangle the party; and it lasted so many hours. It was past two when Kiddie came up to her; she was feeling rather dazed, and he said authoritatively:

"You mustn't overdo it. Don't forget to-morrow night; you've been through quite enough for one day. I am going to take you home now."

Edgar pleaded for another half-hour. Tom said Lord Kidderminster was quite right. Miss Sarita must not overdo it; she was beginning to look tired. Then there followed enthusiastic "good nights," and more congratulations. The women would have kissed her, only Sally so obviously did not look for it. She stood upright, with a sense of isolation about her, even now, a spiritual something, indefinable, but they felt it. They went in a body to see her off. Edgar grinned and said something to Tom. Tom frowned and made no answer to him.

"You go and get your things," Tom said to the little French girl, the new importation, whose second song had gone so much better than her first, and justified him. "I'll drop you at your rooms."

"Very nice for me! But who am I to drop at their rooms?" Edgar complained.

But for Edgar there were congenial spirits among the party. His indecorous wit soon found the soil in which to flourish.

Sally was too excited to feel tired, and Kiddie was husky and silent.

"Pull that cloak close round you. You must not catch cold." He put her cloak more closely round her when they were in the brougham, and his arm with it.

Sally did not resent it; she was too happy to resent a little thing like that. She talked of her dance, of what she had felt about it after the rehearsal, of the supper they had had, and the evening generally. Kiddie's arm, pressing always more closely, more tightly around her, was an inconvenience, nothing more.

He came upstairs when they got to Tillery Mansions. She heard him tell the coachman he need not wait; but she attached no importance to that.

"Are you coming in?" she asked lightly, perhaps a little surprised, as she unlocked the door with her key. "It's getting awfully late, isn't it? But I do believe I'm too excited to sleep."

The flat was in darkness, and Sally fumbled for the switch of the electric light, talking all the while. Then it was that Kiddie seized hold of her, his husky voice pitched very low:

"Don't turn on the light yet, don't. Sarita, give me a kiss; you've never kissed me."

Sally pushed him away with her elbow. Now she had found the switch, the passage was lighted, and the sitting-room door open.

"What rubbish you're saying. What's the matter with you, you look quite pale?" She smiled at him; the smile irradiated her. "I say, you are in a funny humour; what's come over you? You've come upstairs too quick."

The fire was still smouldering in the sitting-room, the light from the passage warred with its sombre glow. Kiddie followed her into the room. They were really little more

than boy and girl. He had been waiting all the evening for this moment. To her the evening and its triumph were over. She could see that he was still labouring under some excitement, but she did not realize its nature.

"I'm not really tired, it's only my feet." She sat down on the sofa. "It *has* been a day!"

"Take your shoes off," he said, rather hoarsely. He kneeled to take them off for her.

She jumped up quickly, and the old speech, almost a touch of the old sullenness, came over her.

"I can't abide being touched."

"I didn't mean any harm."

His breath came laboriously, and his eyes and mouth looked strange to her. He pulled her down beside him on the sofa; he grew weak all at once, he had had a long evening, and kept command of himself a long time, he felt the strain most at this moment, when it was relaxed.

"Be kind to me," he said, "be kind to me." He put his arms about her.

She shrank from him, only instinctively. Hardly a glimmer of his meaning had come to her yet, that shrinking was quite involuntary. She let him hold her a minute, although she did not like it. And she smiled into his pale face and gleaming eyes:

"Of course I'll be kind to you. . . ."

At that his arms tightened around her, pressing her shrinking form, and his hot lips caught and fastened on hers, fastened hungrily. For an instant she was too surprised, startled, and frightened to defend herself. But it was only an instant: there was no enemy within to weaken her, there was not an inch of yielding in her. She struggled passionately, frantically, unmistakably to free herself from him. . . . He let her go at last:

"You knew I loved you," he said hoarsely. He had

been almost overwhelming, she was a little spent with resisting him, a little breathless. There was a sob in her throat, not of weakness, only of anger; but it held her speechless. He misinterpreted it, and would have held her again:

"You've known all along that I loved you," he said, as if in justification. She sprang to her feet:

"No, I didn't; no, I haven't. I never thought nothing about it." Now both of them were standing. "Don't you dare to come anigh me."

"I'll have another kiss if I die for it."

Wine was still working in him, and all the evening only his senses had been stimulated. She had to fight him, she had boasted so often that she could take care of herself; now was the time to show it. And she proved it, up to the hilt; he gained nothing. The struggle was short, sharp, decisive. There was no womanliness in her yet to meet his manhood. This failed quite soon, rejected, contemptuously and angrily scorned. It was Lord Kidderminster who flung himself on the sofa now, hid his face in the cushion, and began to sob weakly.

Silence fell between them in the dusky firelight of the room. Sally had been more moved than she understood, more frightened, perhaps, than she knew or acknowledged. Perhaps something had been born in her when that first hot kiss surprised her. She felt her legs trembling, her eyes were full of tears. The silence became unbearable.

"You'd best go," she said.

Kiddie failed to answer.

"You've spoiled my evening," she repeated. "I don't want you here any more."

He could not pull himself together as quickly as she. It was all so unexpected. He was so unused to contradiction. But also, above all things, as she struggled in

his arms, and he had realized, all at once, that the struggle was a real one, that this was no feint of modesty, there had flooded over him a new feeling, a tenderness almost unbearable, a self-hatred and contempt. It was not that her strength had vanquished his; it was his own tenderness that sapped his strength. It was love that came to him in that strange moment, weakening him. His pride went down under it. Only once or twice in all his two-and-twenty years had his pride left him, and in its place there had been humility. This had been in moments when the encompassing and unselfish love his mother bore him had been revealed in some small action, or in some unexpected word. This mother-love had made Lord Kidderminster what he was; on the ever-swelling tide of it he had floated times and oft out of danger.

All at once it made Sally Snape's safety. Although they were alone within these four walls, she was as safe from him as if his mother were there to guard her. His face was buried, he did not hear Sally speaking. For weeks he had been haunted and inflamed by this red-haired, pale-faced girl; he had not paused to think of where his feelings would land him. Why should he? Even now that thought came: why should he? He had done many things for her; every one thought she was his, she was his by many rights. A Verandah Theatre girl! He had taken this flat for her, everything in the situation had been ordinary . . . almost ordinary! Now his cheeks burned that he had thought this.

"Aren't you going?" said Sally again. She was so surprised she did not hate him, she could think of nothing but that. She wished he would get up, she believed he was crying; he had been very, very kind to her.

"Give me a minute," he said presently, "give me a minute." But he sat up, and she saw that his eyes were wet.

"I'm sorry if I hurt you," she got out, she was prone to over-rate her physical strength.

"You hurt me in so many ways," he answered dully with involuntary candour.

It was wonderful how quiet the atmosphere had suddenly grown between them. Sally's instinct knew it; she no longer urged him to go. She really smiled at him again, through the trembling mist of her unready tears.

"You deserved it," she answered quickly.

He rose to go, he wanted to get away now. But he knew that he had not been wooing his mistress, he had been attempting the virtue of a virtuous girl. And he was ashamed. Her simplicity and directness had never varied. She had not coquetted with, nor purposely allured, him. If she had taken something from him, it was unconsciously. He knew that; she had neither given, nor promised, return.

"You won't give up the flat?" he asked, as he held out his hand to take leave of her.

"I'd like it to myself," she retorted, but not very convincingly.

"I'm going, I'm going at once. Sarita . . . if things had been different . . .? You don't really dislike me, do you?"

Not one of the girls he knew, not one of those that were equal to him in birth, had held him off, and won his respect, more than his respect, as this girl from the gutter. What if he . . . a great thought struck him! He stooped hurriedly, he kissed her hand, Sally Snape's hand. It was quite soft, and the look she gave him was soft too; to palliate the distress in his looks.

"Don't hate me," were his last words.

He got away hurriedly, and ran downstairs. He knew he was in a mood to do something desperately foolish; he had been so seldom denied, she looked so pale . . . and sweet.

CHAPTER XIII

THE next morning, and all that week, Sally's dance, her song, her hair, her figure, were prominent in the theatrical columns of the daily and weekly papers. Sally's flat was besieged by photographers, and her letter-box filled with press-cuttings. She was very bewildered, and uncertain how to take the good fortune, and, if it had not been for the ubiquitous Edgar, she might have ruined her brilliant career at the outset, or so he told her, by giving too many interviews, sitting to the wrong photographer, and being too easily accessible. However, he put her right on all these points, he found her very amenable, very obedient. In truth, her mind was full of many things.

She did not see Kiddie for a week, that week in which her fame grew, and the Verandah was crammed nightly by old men and young, to whom had spread the rumour of her grace and form, her dancing and the spirit of her; a week in which she saw much, and learnt something. It was her first week on the musical comedy stage, it was indeed a strange world in which she found herself.

Life on the musical comedy stage, with its curious lack of reticence, its odd etiquette and idiosyncrasies, puzzled her, and distracted her simplicity. What she failed to understand she simply accepted. There were dozens and dozens of girls around her, pretty, ugly, young, and old. At first the majority of them cold-shouldered her; she was in the position of a new boy at a public school, tolerably

happy in being here at all, but with that only as compensation. Gradually she learnt that all the pretty girls had "friends," whom they called their "boys"; some had only one, but others were less exclusive. These young men or boys had season-tickets for the stalls. The Kittys, and Lenas, and Zillas, and Maudies lunched or supped with them, went for drives on Sundays, demanded much, took everything, and prided themselves on giving nothing.

The majority of them were "good" girls. They put some meaning into this word to preserve their self-respect, and yet deprive them of none of the entertainment which their lives seemed to render necessary. They lived in the glare of the footlights, night-lives, filled with small excitements. They came from poor homes, and lived alternately in luxury and poverty. They would sup with their "boys" at the Savoy on *foie gras* and champagne one night, and the next, as contentedly, at Brixton or Putney, they would eat trotters, washed down with beer, in the company of father, brother, and mother of the honest working classes. They kept themselves respectable. This was their shibboleth, whilst they wore jewellery for which they had practically asked, and fine clothes for which they had no means or intention of paying. They accounted themselves virtuous by reason of this non-paying!

Tom Peters had a paternal eye on them; they had graduated on his and Edgar's good advice. The pith of it was that they were to wait for their price. Neither beauty nor talent escaped the vigilance of these two. The young ones, the new-comers, were well looked after, and their records noted. A standard of conduct was required, and kept at the theatre; out of it a standard of commercialism was always understood as desirable.

"Be good girls; don't give yourselves away," perhaps best sums up Tom's instructions. The bulk of the chorus

understood what was expected of them, and obeyed instructions; they were "as good as they knew how."

There were two or three notorious exceptions — girls, drawing one pound a week in salary, who drove to rehearsals in broughams or motors. These had no young men in attendance. They were like Eton boys who had got into "pop"; secretly envied, openly maligned, discussed constantly, every act and gesture criticised. They were outside the *esprit de corps* that bound together the rest of the band.

At first all looked askance at Sally. She was difficult to understand. She worked hard, harder than any of the others, at rehearsal, at practising her dances and songs, at mending and making her wardrobe. Her little flat was the pink of neatness. She was a born dancer, but her singing was safe only in chorus or concerted pieces. Her voice came and went, it was never quite placed. As one of the four "Pear Drops," or one of the five "Bridesmaids," she did all that was required of her. She could join in "The Candy on the Cake," or "We're the Sugar on the Bun, we're the Sugar on the Hot-Cross Bun," but as a soloist she was not dependable. They had to cut out one of her songs before she had been singing it a week; and this made her an object of sympathy behind the scenes. But Sally accepted the change without making a fuss. They gave her instead another solo dance, and she was encored in it nightly. She was a "good girl," and Tom and Edgar both praised her. For, if she had made a fuss, Kiddie might have backed her up, and Kiddie was running the show.

In the meantime where *was* Kiddie?

Kiddie was passing through a bad time, and doing it characteristically. He had promised himself to put Sarita Mainwaring out of his head. He was no seducer, no

villain, only a young man with his code of ethics unformulated, and his opinion of all women, except his mother and sisters, a little out of focus.

He had been rudely awakened that evening at Tillery Mansions; but he was not ready to open his eyes fully. He had passed a very restless, disturbed, and unsatisfactory night after the *première* at the Verandah. The wildest thoughts came to him, only to be thrust on one side, and rejected when daylight dawned. After a day of doubt and uncertainty, a day in which three times he started for the flat, and each time altered his mind halfway, he hurriedly took the line of least resistance, which seemed to be the afternoon train to Paris. It was an eminently commonplace thing to do, but then, and up to now, in all externals Gilbert Taylour Burnarsham, Lord Kidderminster, was an extremely ordinary, not to say commonplace, young man.

That week in Paris he took his corrective, as corrective should be taken, very thoroughly. But at the end of the week he felt like a man who needed a physician, and had been treated by a quack. He was no better; his worst symptoms were unabated. He still felt weak, with the capacity to make a fool of himself. Sarita Mainwaring's hair and eyes, her smile and figure, haunted his dreams and his waking. And the thought that had driven him from London stayed with him in Paris.

At the end of the week he came back. He avoided the theatre, although he could not avoid hearing about Miss Sarita Mainwaring. Her name was on all the hoardings, and, although he dined at Arthur's, and played bridge afterwards, he could not get away from it. It seemed to follow him everywhere. Some one said he had heard she was "quite straight." Another youngster replied callously: "Well, that won't last long. They've got no use for prudes at the Verandah."

And Kiddie suddenly found the club dull and bridge a bore. He went early to bed, and for the eighth consecutive night he was restless.

A late breakfast, an irresolute morning, found him at Curzon Street in time for lunch. Lady Dorothea had missed him. She told him so quite frankly, after keeping him waiting until two-thirty, and then coming in from the park with Sir Clement Dowling. The butler had told him her ladyship had ordered luncheon for two.

"Hullo! Kiddie, back at last! Where on earth have you been? Dissipating, of course. I've missed you dreadfully. Now I see you in the light, you *have* been dissipating. You look quite seedy. You shall tell me all about it after luncheon. Just wait while I take my hat off; I shan't be five minutes."

She was away for fifteen. In the meantime the two young men exchanged monosyllables. There is no conversational bridge between Stonyhurst and Eton, until more years than these two boasted have served to build one.

Kiddie was annoyed at being told he looked dissipated. He was annoyed, too, at finding Sir Clement Dowling in possession, and Colonel Fellowes absent. He had come here chiefly in the hope of meeting the Colonel, and the gauche and silent young Baronet was a most indifferent substitute.

"Where is Fellowes?" he asked Dorothea, as he followed her into the dining-room.

Dorothea had changed her walking dress for a diaphanous tea gown. She looked extraordinarily pretty and wicked, and it irritated Kiddie to think it was for Sir Clement she had thus arrayed herself.

"If you hadn't been hiding yourself from all your friends for the last fortnight you'd have known Freddy was away. He's gone for a week's shooting with two old cronies."

"What a disloyal wretch you are, Dolly," he said *sotto voce*. "And, by the way, I've only been away a week, the inside of a week."

They got through lunch, during which they played battledore and shuttlecock with frank speech, to Sir Clement's great annoyance. On the whole Kiddie was better entertained than he had been for some time. There was no doubt Dolly could make herself very fascinating if she chose. What she chose just now, whether to excite Sir Clement's jealousy, or with some less simple motive, was to fascinate Lord Kidderminster. And she had quite a small success. The boy was really rather miserable. Dolly's kindness to him warmed his heart, and seeing Sir Clement Dowling snubbed for his sake, helped back some of his self-esteem.

After lunch she dismissed Clement, too, quite peremptorily.

"I want to talk to Kiddie," she said. "I'm sure you don't mind; Kiddie and I haven't seen each other for so long."

Perhaps Sir Clement did mind; yet he had no choice but to go. Then Dolly arranged herself on the sofa in the drawing-room, and bade Kiddie come and sit by her and tell her all about everything. Of course, she was in need of his cousinly cheque-book, but that was not the atmosphere she created.

"What a bore that fellow is! I wonder you can stick him."

"He's very devoted."

"Has Fellowes gone away because of his devotion?"

"Don't be such a silly boy. Freddy is a man of the world."

"I don't know what you mean by that. Do you mean he isn't jealous; that he doesn't mind if you've got other fellows hanging about you?"

"He knows what an over-rated virtue fidelity is. At best it means boredom; you can't always eat the same food, even if it's truffles."

"You don't mean you are going to throw over Freddy Fellowes for a chap like Dowling!"

"I never throw anybody over. I only sometimes increase my circle of friends. How crude you are."

"I can't understand you. Don't you believe in love?"

"I don't believe in anything else. But the game is monotonous if you always play against the same antagonist, and you know every stroke and counter-stroke."

"You call it a game."

"Don't you?"

"No."

He blurted out his denial; he was not a young man who thought quickly as a rule, but already he knew love was no game. The knowledge of its power, which had kept him awake all these nights, and now hammered at his temples, impelled him to words. He wished Dolly would not be so flippant; he would have liked to question her. After all, she was a woman, and a beautiful one. Poor Kiddie knew so little, although he imagined himself fully experienced. How did women feel? He began to ask her questions.

Dorothea could not talk of love without making love. She became alluring; even Kiddie, with his heart and head full of Sarita, could recognize the note she sounded, and its appeal. To a limited extent, he even responded. He could not sit quiet, he moved restlessly about the room as he talked.

They discussed the philosophy of love, they spoke its platitudes; but love was scarcely the right word, although they used it. Her eyes were inviting, her speech was loose. There was something unmoral about Dorothea. One would have credited her with a profession, and said she knew it well.

"Why have you never cared about me?" she said to Kiddie presently. "I wish you'd leave off walking about and come and sit quietly by me. I can talk ever so much better if you sit here." She made room for him again on the sofa. Of course he was flattered when she went on:

"I always wish you made love to me, Kiddie, I know you would do it so well."

"Haven't you got enough men around you?" was nevertheless all he could find to say.

"I couldn't have enough. Now, don't frown, don't try and look stern." She put her hand on his. "Other women like cards, gambling, racing, other women drink. I haven't any of these vices. I only like men. There's nothing to look disgusted about; it's a taste, like any other, old china for instance, or foreign stamps. What a boy you are, Kiddie, and a prig, just the least bit of a prig. You're looking at my hand, and you don't kiss it. Yet I could be great friends with you. . . ."

"Don't, Dolly, you don't know how I hate it."

Whether he hated it or not, it did not drive him away from Curzon Street. He was no better than the majority of young men, and very little different. When one's mind is full of one subject, it is not unpleasant to be told intimate things about it. There is a fascination about forbidden things, even if you do not want them.

Kiddie stayed all that afternoon; the beautiful drawing-room growing dimmer as the afternoon closed. No one disturbed them, the household knew Lady Dolly's ways. It was five o'clock before she rang for tea, and Kiddie hated himself rather more than he had when he came in.

At tea time, because one must talk of something, Kiddie told Dolly of his meeting with Sarita Mainwaring, and her recognition of him as the donor of Sally Snape's premium.

Dolly was very interested, and suggested that, after tea, they should walk round to Brook Street, and ask Vi Farquharson about her. Kiddie consenting, she kept him waiting another three quarters of an hour whilst she changed her dress again.

The establishment in Brook Street had now a man in gorgeous livery to open carriage-doors, and a special constable to regulate the traffic. There was a string of carriages reaching almost into Bond Street, and the large rooms were full of acquaintances. But Vi came forward to greet Dorothea. She knew her well, they spoke a little of Vi's boy at Eton, the people who were in the reception room, of Kiddie's mother, and her movements. Then, carelessly enough, Dolly said:

"By the way, since we are here, you'd better give Kiddie my account, Vi. It's about the only chance you've got of getting it settled. And I want to ask you about that girl I sent here. I hear she has gone on the stage, and is making an enormous success. . . ."

Vi talked about the stage while the account was being made out for Kiddie; incidentally she spoke slightingly of the girls who preferred it to millinery. She spoke as if the stage were but an euphemism. Sarita's child-like eyes were gazing suddenly into Kiddie's; in one strange moment he almost visualized her; the voices, the women, the shop-full of millinery and scented furs vanished, and he was back in the little flat. How different she was. . . .

He was aroused by Mr. Perry coming forward to compliment Lady Dorothea on her general appearance:

"But you ought to have had that sable stole, your ladyship," he said regretfully, alluding to some former visit, going into details to explain why Russian sable was so expensive.

"Lady Dorothea wants to hear about Miss Snape, Mr.

Perry. It seems she is making a success at the Verandah," Mrs. Farquharson said to him.

As all London was talking of nothing else, Mr. Perry was not surprised to hear the news. But, on hearing of Lady Dorothea Lytham's interest, Mr. Perry's eyes sought his lordship's; Kiddie's were inscrutable. Mr. Perry went on fluently:

"She was very well conducted while she was here, quite exemplary in fact."

"But she isn't good-looking?" Lady Dorothea interposed.

"There are always ways by which you can tell if a girl is flighty," he said. "I should say Miss Snape was very steady, she did not care for admiration. And she was a very industrious girl. I wish some of the others were more like her!"

"Well! I'm glad she did not disgrace my recommendation. I shall go and see her to-night."

Lady Dorothea made up her mind quickly. "Come on, Kiddie, we'll get seats. You hope to dress her, I suppose?" she said to Mr. Perry. Again he looked at his lordship before replying, respectfully —

"She has had one or two things from us already. I think we have succeeded in satisfying her. Perhaps his lordship has heard?"

"How should I have heard?" was the abrupt response.

Kiddie's face was rather flushed when they got out of the shop.

"I hate that fellow!" he said shortly.

"Who? Mr. Perry? Why, he is a genius, the greatest sartorial artist of our day. Don't be ill-tempered. You can't be jealous of a shop-walker!"

She had a gift of quick intuition, although it went only surface deep.

But Kiddie had grown restless again; as they walked to the booking-office in Bond Street, he was very silent. Dolly thought he was resenting, perhaps, the amount of Madame Violetta's bill. She exerted herself to rouse him.

Bond Street was full of well-dressed people, and a crowded traffic of carriages, motors, and hansoms frequently blocked the road. Dorothea gossiped gaily as she walked, reputations were as brittle glass in her destructive hands, she broke them one by one:

"There is Lady Cleeve. She has got her new baby and the nurse with her. They say the baby is black—isn't it unlucky? For the Rajah, himself, is almost fair. But there is one thing, Cleeve won't mind. I swear he hasn't been home for a year. That's Lady Bassett, you know, Gerald Leslie's first wife; they say she had forty-nine lovers after her divorce from Gerald, and she married recently because she thought her daughter would be allowed to visit her; she was devoted to her daughter. But she reckoned without the mother-in-law; Kim Stuart's wife has to pretend she never had a mother. But I'm told she is her mother's daughter, nevertheless, and there will be a scandal in her smart ménage quite shortly! I'm rather sorry for Lady Bassett; she hasn't done worse than other people, but she was found out so much oftener. There goes my sister, the Duchess, in her new car. Who has she got in tow now? One of these days she will cut me, see if she doesn't. She has the same tastes, but . . ."

They got the stalls for the Verandah, although not without difficulty. At the box office they heard the same stories the papers had been telling. Tom Peters had got hold of another success. "In Far Cathay" was in for a run. Had they seen the new dancer?

The men behind the counter respectfully informed her ladyship, who was gaily inquisitive and familiar, that Sir William D'Albiac had been in ten minutes ago and said it reminded him of his young days. There had not been such dancing in London since Taglioni. Dolly discussed Sir William's age with the man, and was full of it when they walked away.

"He must be over ninety. But still, Taglioni was an eighteenth-century dancer, wasn't she? Or was that Madame Vestris? I haven't got a bit of memory."

They dined together at the Ritz, very late. Unpunctuality was one of Dolly's particular forms of selfishness. She talked all through dinner, it seemed to him she never ceased talking. And it was all society gossip. According to Lady Dorothea no woman was chaste, none constant to their lovers.

They got to the theatre very late. There were lots of fellows he knew in the stalls; he wished he had been by himself.

When Sarita came on, he felt his cheeks flushing, and his heart thumping against his side. Her smile was for the house, principally for the gallery, not at all for him. There had been moments, ever since that night, when he had felt the possibilities of "making a fool of himself." He knew what he meant by the phrase. Now he knew nothing positively except that that slim, smiling girl, little more than a child, who held the crowded house, was the one thing in the world he wanted. Wanted, and meant to have. All at once he felt, too, savagely, his pain made him savage, that he was not going to make a fool of himself. Dorothea had shown him what women were like when you got to know them. He wasn't going to make a fool of himself. But he was going to get what he wanted.

"She is wonderful!" said Dorothea, "wonderful! I'm not surprised they shout." Sally was having an ovation. "I think I shall go round and speak to her. I suppose I can get round. She is very grateful to me, you say, for getting her into Vi's. She has altered, though, hasn't she?"

Dorothea felt her responsibility, it was something of an adventure to be responsible for a dancer at the Verandah. Dorothea loved to be adventurous.

Kiddie dissuaded her from going to the stage-door, and promised to find out Miss Mainwaring's address.

Having at last got rid of Dolly, he looked in at the Savoy, then at the Carlton, finally at Romano's, where he met Edgar in the hall:

"Hullo! fancy meeting you here! I thought you'd disappeared altogether. Miss Mainwaring is quite disconsolate, surrounded with suitors, but frowning on 'em all."

Kiddie did not resent Edgar's familiarity.

"Is she here?" he asked.

"Here! Not she! We're not virtuous enough for her. She is eating bread and milk in Tillery Mansions. Come in and have some supper. Milly is with me, but I'll easy get a fourth."

Kiddie hesitated.

"No, I don't think I want supper, not just yet, anyhow. How's the play going?"

"Going, my dear fellow, going! Why, it's just booming, house full every night. You'll make your fortune out of that revival. Well, if you're not coming in, I must go. Tom is waiting for me."

Edgar went in to supper smiling to himself, in high good humour; he knew he had said the right thing.

Lord Kidderminster hesitated a moment or two in the

hall; went outside, and hesitated a moment on the pavement, only a moment, however.

"Damn it all, why shouldn't I do what I like?"

He called a hansom.

"Tillery Mansions," he called to the driver, "Victoria Road."

CHAPTER XIV

SALLY came to the door of the flat in answer to his persistent knocking. But she opened it only a little way, keeping the chain up. He could see she was in a dressing gown, and that her hair was already unbound.

"What do you want? Oh, it's you! It's very late. I'm just going to bed."

But she was glad to see him. He knew she was glad to see him, and his heart leapt.

"I only wanted to tell you I was back. I've been away. How have you been going on?"

"All right. They've cut out my song."

"I know. I was there to-night."

"No!"

"Where else should I be? Sarita, undo that chain, let me come in. I want to talk to you."

"Not me!" She flashed her smiles and dimples at him through the chained door.

"Well, tell me you've missed me, tell me you've forgiven me."

Sarita's smiles and dimples faded. She did not want to be reminded. She had missed him, she had wondered what had become of him, and was glad he had returned, glad to see him standing there. But now that he reminded her of his last visit to her rooms, her face fell.

She looked so wonderful, so desirable, even in that scanty glimpse he got of her. The light from the hall was behind her, and he was in the darkness of the landing.

"Tell me you've forgiven me, and that I may come and see you to-morrow. Don't throw me over, Sarita!"

He was just as near making a fool of himself as ever. But her smile had maddened him, and now her fallen face made him yearn to her.

"Say you've forgiven me."

Sally was silent. She wanted to forget.

If he had not doubted, she would not have hesitated.

"You must say yes, you must."

She questioned herself, and her colour came and went:

"You'll go now."

"I'll go if you say I may come in the morning."

She still hesitated.

"I'm at the theatre in the morning, rehearsing."

"You'll lunch with me if I fetch you?"

She did not answer.

"You hate me, then; you know you hate me, although you say you don't."

She was cold and undecided, she wanted to get away from him, and what he brought back to her memory. She had been keeping it all out of her mind.

"Very well, then, in the morning," she said abruptly.

"Good night."

"Good night."

The door was shut in his face. He waited a few moments, hoping it would reopen, trying to talk through it. But Sally had banged it to, and bolted it. He had no choice but to find his way downstairs again, and into the courtyard, where his hansom waited. He was filled with conflicting feelings.

CHAPTER XV

THERE followed a period of drifting. The meeting next morning proved constrained, but things improved during lunch. There were so many things to talk about, so many questions to be asked, they had so much to say to each other. Sally did not want to remember, and Kiddie did not want to think.

In another day or two Kiddie's sudden passion, Sally's fierce rejection of it, seemed as if it had never been.

Neither Tom nor Edgar understood how matters were between the pair. They hardly understood it themselves. What did it matter?

Gradually it came about that Lord Kidderminster and his brougham or motor were all day long at the disposal of Miss Sarita Mainwaring. He took her to the photographers, he fetched her from rehearsals, he altered his customary hours to drive with her at five in the afternoon. He gave many theatrical parties during this period. Sally could ask any of the girls she liked; all Kiddie's school and college pals came, and often Tom and Edgar.

Sally's invitations were looked upon doubtfully at first. It took her some time to understand the social differences and distinctions of this queer little world. Why the first row resented the existence of the third, and Milly, with one faithful attendant, could not be brought to meet Elsie le Roy, who had apparently none, continually puzzled her. There were no ladies at all at the first party Lord Kidderminster gave. Sally had been so indiscriminate in her invitations that there was, as it were, a strike among her

guests, ending in a dreadful fiasco of empty places. Edgar came to her assistance after that, and Lord Kidderminster had often the privilege of paying for the supper of seven or eight pretty girls, and their swains. But it was long before Kitty Golden and Elsie Glynn, Miss Marie Carruthers, or any of the principals, joined the Kidderminster parties, with Miss Mainwaring as hostess.

Kiddie always saw Sarita home after these suppers. But he said "Good night" to her as she entered the lift. There was a strange shyness between them, although it was only at rare moments that it became acute. At other times she talked to him freely of the little incidents of her daily life, of her vocal difficulties, domestic arrangements, the kindness or unkindness or incomprehensibility of the girls. Kiddie's companionship loosened her difficult tongue, and nothing in his life had ever seemed to him so interesting as this simple prattle. It was limpid, absolutely sincere, and candid. Sally had nothing to hide.

Sally's salary was raised, and raised again. For indebtedness worried her, and Kiddie could not bring himself to offer her money or clothes. Always failing to understand the circumstances or position, Tom and Edgar continued to pay her supplemental salary without a word.

Yet it did not suffice for what Mr. Perry considered her needs:

"You can't go out with his lordship in that old dress! Why! he's seen you in it a score of times," he would say contemptuously. "Miss Baines, Miss Mainwaring must have a new motor coat. Let one of these girls put on that moleskin. No, not that, stupid! Really, sometimes I think they do it on purpose — the one with the ermine lining, of course."

Sally was greedy, as a child is greedy; she had a keen appetite for sweets, and with Sally sweets meant dress.

But she was honest, and, although Mr. Perry's approval was always valued by her, and he never lost his influence, he could never persuade her to get deeply into debt. The cost of her food was infinitesimal, so much of it was taken in the company of Lord Kidderminster. The rent of her flat, according to the arrangement Edgar told her he had made, was deducted from her salary. Joe Aarons got his percentage quite regularly. Sally liked paying it, for she continued to feel grateful to Joe for the start he had given her. But still the Brook Street bill was always worrying her. She knew she ought to be saving; for she had not only tasted poverty, but fed upon it, for years, nauseating, unforgettable meals. She talked about it to Kiddie, picturing a possible future when the public might not like her dancing; her sweet lips trembled when she said that they had already tired of her song.

Kiddie had his answer ready. Often and often it came as far as his lips, though it could not pass them, and always it was in his thoughts.

When he was not with her, he felt glad that he had been seen driving about with her, been met with her in restaurants, playing the game, apparently, that was expected of a man of his class with a girl of hers. He humbugged himself like this. But often, when she was talking to him frankly, as friend to friend, expecting sympathy, without a touch of sex in it, he felt ashamed. He cared for no one else's company; all the fibres of his nature were stretching out to her continually. How honest she was! All the women he knew were so subtle! How pure she was! All the women of his world, that limited Mayfair Street world, were so stained.

Lady Fortive, his invalid mother, banished now to the Riviera, forbidden the fatigues of the parliamentary season, noticed, about this time, a change in his letters:

"Are you quite well?" she wrote to him. "Somehow I fancy you are not yourself. Am I a fidgety old mother, or is there something worrying you? Write me if I can be any use. You know you have all my heart, something tells me all is not well with you. Perhaps I'm painting devils, but I find myself dreaming of you. You know, I am sure you know, that there is no trouble you could have I would not wish to share. If — don't be vexed if my thoughts lead me the wrong way — you have encountered disappointment, if there is anything you are doing, or have done, with which you are reproaching yourself, come and tell me all about it. Two heads are better than one, but there is nothing I would not do to help you if you are in any trouble, and there is nothing you could do with which I should reproach you. Gilbert, I feel by some deep mother-instinct that you are in trouble. Let me help you, dear; you stand first with me in the world. . . ."

He answered this in a few curt lines:

"Dear Mater, leave off worrying about me, I don't want you to make yourself ill again. You are right, of course, you always are. I *have* got a touch of the blues, but I'm best alone. I'll come over in a week or two, most likely, and talk things over with you. Meanwhile, cheer up, I shall be all right. Lovingly, Gilb."

Kiddie longed for solitude, yet could not bear to be alone. He made appointments, all sorts of appointments, and broke them recklessly. But he still went often to Curzon Street. He and Dorothea had fallen into curious confidential relations. She told him much, not only about herself, but about their mutual acquaintances. The bulk of it was probably untrue, but the atmosphere it revealed was of a corner of Mayfair, an obscure corner, perhaps, incredibly corrupt and immoral. It was his

youth and inexperience that made him accept it as the climate of the whole quarter.

Lady Dorothea carried out her intention of calling upon Miss Sarita Mainwaring, and reminding her of the obligations of Sally Snape.

It was after her visit to the flat that she made an unexpected call upon Colonel Fellowes, who had only returned from Scotland that morning, and was rather overwhelmed by the honour.

Colonel Fellowes had a small, dingy, eighteenth-century house in Half Moon Street. He liked the panelling and the carved wood stair-rails, and it did not affect his pleasure in the height of the wainscoting, and the characteristic cornices, to know that the floors were uneven and rotten, the basement alive with vermin, and the whole edifice dangerously out of alignment. He liked to see his prints on these panelled walls, his fine Persian rugs on these uneven floors, his Staffordshire pottery enniched in the quaint powder-room, opening out of the drawing-room, where his collections of theatre tokens, silhouettes, needlework pictures, made the *olla podrida* of background suited to the diversity of his tastes.

Hospitality was a habit of his Indian days, which his life in London had not destroyed. He was breakfasting when Dorothea tornadoed in, in her inconsiderate way. He made her sit down and join him in his coffee. There were occasions when Colonel Fellowes could make even Lady Dorothea Lytham rational and decent. He knew she was full of something she wanted to tell him, but he would not have it shot at him; she must wait until he was ready. So she drank her coffee, and listened while he told of the sport he had enjoyed, recognizing, as always, that there was more of the man about him than any one else she knew. She was almost sorry, as she sat there,

that she was as she was. For he was really desirable and difficult. But then she remembered she was a Desmond, and grew self-content.

"It's about Kiddie," she began. The breakfast was over and cleared away, Colonel Fellowes had his permission to smoke, and Dolly lit her cigarette, companionably.

She looked very well this morning, in her dark sable cap with its aigrette, and her smart braided morning dress. She had thrown off her coat; she was quite at home here.

"Oh! about Kiddie, is it? And what has Kiddie been doing?"

Colonel Fellowes was nonchalant, only mildly interested as yet; but she had been full of her subject for the last half-hour. The Colonel's breakfast was a late meal; Dolly's visit to Sally had been paid at eleven.

"What have you heard since you've been away? I want to begin at the beginning."

"Oh; I've heard all the gossip. Lady Cleeve has turned suffragette, and has bitten a policeman, or been bitten by a Labour Member. . . ."

She interrupted impatiently.

"Stale, old, stupid. I mean what have you heard about Kiddie?"

"That you have been flirting with him, and that Dowling is dismissed. You see, I'm well posted!"

She had not even the grace to blush.

"I see you are not a bit up to date. I wish you'd leave off talking, and let me have a turn. You remember that girl I visited in the hospital, and paid a premium for to go to Vi?"

A gleam of interest shot into his eyes; he remembered quite well.

"A red-haired girl?"

"Yes, that's it. Well, she's got hold of Kiddie."

"Got hold of Kiddie!"

"She's gone on the stage. Half London is talking about her. I went to see her just now in a beastly little flat in Victoria. Well! Kiddie was there! At eleven in the morning. He ran in, after I'd been there five minutes, as if the place belonged to him."

"It probably does," interposed the Colonel *sotto voce*, and rather amused.

"Don't be silly. I should have recognized that sort of thing at once. Besides . . ." But she did not finish her sentence, she went off at a tangent. "Oh, no! it was all natural and above-board; Kiddie had no frills on. He was surprised at seeing me there, and said he thought it very kind of me, but not as if he were surprised at all. He and the girl were full of appointments and arrangements; they seem to have been practically spending their days together. And Kiddie has never said a word to me about her. Oh, yes! a week ago he said something, not since, though I've seen him almost daily. I'm sure there is something in it."

Colonel Fellowes' innate courtesy prevented him saying all that was in his mind, but he smiled and settled himself more comfortably in his easy chair, and suggested, as delicately as he could, that Kiddie was quite at liberty to visit Verandah Theatre girls, but it was not an occupation which Lady Dorothea need share with him.

"But there's nothing of that sort in it," she persisted. "I know what I'm talking about. It's philanthropy, it's friendship, it's anything you like, but it isn't what you think."

"Well! what is your view of it? What are you making a fuss about? Kiddie is of age. And he can take care of himself."

"No man can take care of himself when a girl has got

red hair, and innocent eyes, and all his friends are talking about her."

Lady Dorothea did not succeed in impressing Colonel Fellowes that Lord Kidderminster was in any particular danger. He attributed her excitement about it to the most natural cause. Kidderminster's distant cousinship was a very valuable asset in Lady Dorothea's drifting social whirlpool; and lately she had been utilizing it to its extreme extent.

"Where is Kiddie to be found?" he asked.

"He has not lunched in Curzon Street for three days. I asked him just now if I should see him later, and he turned round to her in the most natural manner, and said: 'What are you doing, Sarita?' You know her name isn't Sarita at all; it's Sally."

"Well, and then what happened?"

Dorothea looked at him with impudent, smiling candour.

"I said: 'You come too, Miss Mainwaring. Bring her, Kiddie.' Then I came to fetch you. I've a crowd coming, and I want you to help."

"What will you be doing next, I wonder!"

She expected a scolding, but did not get it. Colonel Fellowes' feeling for Lady Dorothea Lytham had passed beyond the illusion stage. Next time, and at all times, she would do or say that which suited her temperamental indecorousness, without the slightest consideration for his or any one else's feelings.

He accompanied her on a shopping expedition, spent half an hour with her at Agnew's Winter Exhibition, and went back with her to Curzon Street, falling naturally into his habits.

But he, no less than Dolly, noticed something exceptional in the relations of Miss Sarita Mainwaring and Lord Kidderminster. In the first place, Colonel Fellowes, although

he thought Dorothea's invitation had been injudicious, if nothing worse, had a positive notion that it would not be accepted. He felt confident that, when the time came, a telegram or messenger boy, a telephone, or dashing hansom, would deliver some conventional excuse. He had a very good opinion of Kiddie, *au fond*. He knew Kiddie was not clever, nor even athletic, but certainly he had a sense of the fitness of things! If this Sarita Mainwaring was what Colonel Fellowes shrewdly conjectured, then Kiddie would not bring her to lunch with his cousin.

But here she was, and Kiddie with her, waiting their return, not impatiently, in that over-crowded Curzon Street drawing-room.

Dolly greeted them warmly. Colonel Fellowes supplemented his introduction to Sarita with:

"We've met before, I think," and was surprised, perhaps gratified, to hear how well Miss Mainwaring remembered the occasion.

"I'm glad to see you back, Fellowes; London has been empty without you," Kiddie said warmly, when he and Sarita had exchanged remembrances.

"That's a pretty compliment to me."

Dolly had no time to fling more than this challenge to Kiddie, because other guests came in; Lady Cleeve, with the newest millionaire, the Duchess of Ebrington, accompanied by a philanthropic church-and-stage clergyman; Harry Crossley, and Lulu Brodrick. Lady Dorothea was not yet outside the pale, although already she received more guests than invitations. The Duchess of Ebrington would cling to her family as long as it was in any way possible; and, whatever her secret habits, her own position is still unassailable.

Soon every one was talking at once, racing and sport, dress, bridge, and gossip.

Sally sat amongst them, with them, but not of them; her eyes were bright with bewilderment. She wished herself at Romano's, at the theatre, at the flat, anywhere but here.

But Kiddie had so urged her to come. Lady Dorothea might be a useful friend to her, he had said. Heaven knows what he had in his mind. He saw, dimly, a path before him, a clean white path. But his feet were not yet set upon it. He tried to drag Sally into the conversation, to make her shine before Dolly and her guests, but he elicited only monosyllables. The Four-in-Hand Club was spoken of:

"Miss Mainwaring is learning to drive; she'll handle the ribbons famously one of these days, won't you, Miss Sarita?" he said.

Captain Crossley looked at her with some interest; none of them had yet identified her.

"I don't know," she answered. "Perhaps I shall, but it won't be for a long time."

"Do you like driving?" asked Colonel Fellowes, as he took his seat beside her at the luncheon table.

"Well enough," said the factory girl, feeling that James's eye was on her, for the last time she had had a meal here it was in the kitchen. She wished herself again in that friendly kitchen. She felt herself out of place, and was resentful of her own disabilities and the others' ease. She could not explain her discomfort; she did everything wrong with the knives and the forks, the glasses, her crumbled bread. She thought they were all looking at her, and laughing at her. But only the butler was at all interested in her table vagaries. Lady Dorothea was admiring her grey *voile* with the chenille embroidery, the grey-shaded feather in her hat. She knew it was a "Perry"; knew it by the tiny bow at the neck, by the bit of wall-flower colouring in it; her quick eye had seen the wall-

flower petticoat as Sally passed before her into the room. It distracted her from her consideration of etiquette:

"Mr. Perry made you that dress, didn't he?" she asked across the table.

"Yes."

"I could tell him anywhere. He has such an extraordinary instinct for colour. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, m'lady."

That did draw attention to her, and wondering eyes questioned Dorothea with amusement. Dorothea was equal to the occasion; there was nothing in what she said to make Lord Kidderminster furious, although that was the immediate result of her explanation:

"You've none of you met Miss Mainwaring before, have you? But she is an old friend of mine. I practised with the Panhard, when it first came home, over her prostrate body. She was on the way from a picnic at Epping with the other girls from Messrs. Hall & Palmer's. When she was patched up again I made Vi take her. Now she is the cynosure of all eyes — aren't you, Miss Mainwaring? — at the Verandah Theatre."

"Miss Sarita Mainwaring!" exclaimed together the clergyman and Captain Crossley. Both of them had studied her from the front, both of them stared at her now, quite regardless of her feelings. Her feelings were only those of poignant discomfort; she went on crumbling her bread. The wild rose flushed in her cheeks, and her eyes were suffused, she wished they would talk of some one else.

"Kiddie paid the premium for her at Vi's," Lady Dorothea continued mischievously. She was not in the least affected by Sally's embarrassment, and she was enjoying the expression of fury on Kiddie's face. "I hope Miss Mainwaring will find some way of making it up to him. . . ."

Sally looked up eagerly, she wanted to say she was

grateful, she would try and make it up to Lord Kidderminster. But Lady Dorothea's laugh, the laugh that echoed rather lightly round the table, struck her dumb again.

Under cover of it Colonel Fellowes began to talk to her. He had a charming voice, an unfailing tact, and he considered Dolly was behaving exceptionally badly. Before luncheon was over, that incongruous, strange luncheon, he had realized something of Sally's charm. For, with him, too, once he had set her talking, and at her ease, she was completely frank. She was so glad he liked her frock, Mr. Perry thought the wall-flower red just took up the shade of her hair.

"Don't you love jewellery too?" he asked her.

She wore none, not even a ring on the small hands. Sally's first and last purchase of jewellery had been the imitation tortoise-shell combs with the turquoise. She told Colonel Fellowes about them:

"I gave them to the cook at Miss Rugeley's. I've never had ornaments since. It's so easy to go wrong with ornaments," she said simply. "Mr. Perry has often said that."

"Of course. But with that dress you've on, for instance, a chain, very slender, of *cabochon* rubies, would be the very thing. I know where there is one," he went on; "at Phillips' in Bond Street. You ought to go and see it."

Dorothea heard him; her peaked small ears missed little, and her chair was only two from his.

"Mephistopheles!" she threw at him, smiling, quite low. No one heard it but himself, it was grimaced rather than spoken.

Colonel Fellowes was very well amused, he liked the hesitant low quality of Sally's voice; there was no exertion in fishing such limpid waters.

"Shall I tell Phillips to send it up for you to see? You might get Kiddie to give it you," he said, observing the effect of his suggestion.

The most beautiful colour overspread her cheeks.

"Could I?" she said. "Could I?" quite excited with the suggestion, and the description. But then her face fell, and she shook her head. "You don't know how much he has given me. I couldn't ever ask him for anything more."

"Well! Shall I give it you? May I at least bring it for your inspection some afternoon? Let me see, Tillery Mansions, isn't it?"

Why should not he have a hand in the game, he as well as Dolly? She was a pretty little girl, she only wanted teaching. Kiddie had not got her on very well.

The men began discussing Miss Sarita Mainwaring as soon as the ladies had left the room. Whilst the talk referred to her dancing, Kiddie was silent, for they all agreed it was superb, unexampled.

"What's her history?" asked Mr. Dakin, the Australian millionaire who had come with Lady Cleeve.

"One of honest work," interposed Kiddie, hotly.

Colonel Fellowes' eyes twinkled, and he rolled his cigarette delicately.

"I hear you've given her a brougham and a motor to take her backwards and forwards to it," said Harry Crossley lightly, and would have continued in the same tone, had he not been startled by Kiddie's hot contradiction:

"Then you've heard a damned lie. She's a decent, straight, hard-working little girl."

"Oh, well, the Verandah Theatre and Tom Peters will soon cure her of that for you," Lulu Brodrick interposed comfortably.

"I don't want her to be cured!" Kiddie muttered.

He was sullen, fierce, unaccountable; they were surprised into silence. But, after another conversational hare had been quickly started by Colonel Fellowes and pursued, when they had got through their wine, and smoked enough of their cigars to rejoin the ladies, an uncomfortable impression remained in their minds, a nucleus that crystallized into the rumour concerning Gillie Kidderminster and a possible *mésalliance*, which from that day forward became the gossip of London Clubland.

Kiddie and Colonel Fellowes remained after the others had left the room. Kiddie continued silent; there was a sense of restraint about him, a holding in of his forces.

The older man said, after waiting for the confidence that failed to come:

"Well, what is it going to lead to?"

"What? What? I don't know what you mean."

"Platonic friendships with theatre girls."

Kiddie was not ready-tongued.

"Do you think you were quite wise in bringing the girl here to-day?" the Colonel went on, still feeling his way. "She did not strike me as feeling comfortable, or at home."

"There's no reason she shouldn't come here or anywhere," Kiddie answered, violently.

"I'm sorry to hear that," was the gentle answer. Freddy Fellowes puffed at his cigarette with cynical eyes and uplifted brows. "Very sorry. She's a pretty girl — and dances for a living!"

"She's as good as gold."

"I know. I heard you say so; you need not go on saying it. I think it's a pity, that's all; she's got her bad time to go through, instead of having left it behind her."

"You are a damned cynic, you are."

"What! Because I'm sorry for a good little girl who

has gone to school at the Verandah Theatre? I wonder if all one hears of Tom Peters is true, if he really does make it a *sine qua non*. . . ."

"Oh! Don't give me that newspaper twaddle about Tom Peters; he's a good business man, that's all they've got against him."

"And about Miss Mainwaring . . ."

"I don't want to talk about Miss Mainwaring."

"But other people will talk, if it is true that she has the use of your carriages and the monopoly of your time!"

Colonel Fellowes used his position and his privileges temperately, he was so much the older man. During the conversation that ensued he exhibited his worldly intelligence, and Kiddie only a boyish intemperance. He had wanted a counsellor, a confidant all this time, and Freddy Fellowes was always the one he had in his mind. He was such a good fellow, and a man of the world, and his advice would surely be worth following. Kiddie, in his restlessness of mind and irresolution, had looked on Colonel Fellowes, when he should return from Scotland, as his only possible anchor. But now he found him disappointing, unsympathetic, irritating.

Colonel Fellowes read the boy's mind as an open book, and feared what was at the back of it. Dorothea had done no good in inviting Sally there, it made the impossible seem possible. To do Colonel Fellowes justice, it must be admitted that he knew nothing of Sally except what was on the surface. He determined that Kiddie must not be allowed to make an ass of himself, and wreck his life at the opening.

"You don't mind if I go and see her?"

"I tell you I've got no authority to allow or prevent her seeing any one she has a mind to, or doing anything

she chooses. She is nothing to me." The boy's face belied his words. "But I'm sorry for her, with all this damned talk about Verandah Theatre girls. They are every bit as straight as . . ."

But his eyes met the Colonel's, and he did not finish his sentence. "I'm a friend of hers, just a friend, nothing more."

CHAPTER XVI

IT has been said that Colonel Fellowes was a man of the world. He had started his career, some twenty years ago, by being co-respondent in one of the most famous of the infamous divorce cases of the day. He was then a boy of four-and-twenty. At a country ball he had met a charming young married woman, a fellow guest at Lady Fortive's. An ordinary dance and flirtation was followed by an invitation to call upon her in London. Pursuing the flirtation, it had meant nothing more to him, Colonel, then Lieutenant, Fellowes was made acquainted with his inamorata's mother and married sister. All of them passed for being in society. That the society they were in was but that murky corner of Mayfair which Lady Dorothea Lytham had shown Kiddie, could not possibly be known to the young soldier. The mother was the acknowledged widow of a peer, the unacknowledged mistress of one of our foremost politicians, a brilliant cynical fascinating man of about five-and-forty. Lieutenant Frederick Fellowes availed himself of privileges freely offered him. The eminent politician betrayed a short-lived interest in the other sister. A tale of promiscuity, afterwards freely ventilated in the law courts, was quickly developed. The husband of Mrs. Carruthers became the *deus ex machina* used by Lady Somers as the first weapon she could find to avenge her hideous jealousy against her own daughter.

Sir George Brydges saw his career ruined, the discre-

pancies of his private life made public, his friends outraged.

These abominable people, the mother and the two daughters, had used one house in particular as a rendezvous for their lovers. Lieutenant Fellowes had been there with one sister. When a public scandal was inevitable he was crudely asked what sum he would take to say he had been there with the other. Every possible effort was made to save Sir George Brydges for his party, for the country. If Lady Somers could be made to believe it was Mr. Fellowes who had been her daughter's lover, if Mr. Fellowes could be induced to disappear without contradicting it, Mr. Carruthers would get his divorce with one co-respondent, and Lady Somers' mouth might be shut.

But Lieutenant Frederick Fellowes said that for a million of money he would perjure himself neither in *esse* nor in *facto*. He brought an oblique sense of honour, and a youthful obstinacy, to meet a situation that then and always was beyond his complete comprehension.

The unsavoury case was threshed out at full length. The public, violently inconsistent under the intermittent lash of its spasmodic conscience, was strong enough to hound out of public life the one man who knew the strength and weakness of our colonial policy. The early disasters of the South African campaign may, perhaps, be said to have been primarily due to the Brydges case. Incidentally, too, society would have nothing to say to Mr. Frederick Fellowes. The society that would have nothing to do with Lieutenant Fellowes was not, however, that murky corner which he had hitherto thought comprised the whole. He had had enough of that. And his opinion of women was soiled almost past redemption. The lies that were told in the witness-box, the whole sordid ugly business, warped his mind. It took him fifteen years of active service, in India,

in Egypt, and, finally, in South Africa, before he got clean again.

And it was just fifteen years later when Lady Dorothea Lytham went out to South Africa, to the picnic that all the South African War was expected to be in the early days, to join her husband.

Captain Fellowes had seen her, a child, with her sisters and brothers at the Fortives'. As a child of ten she had been beautiful, lively, engaging, frank, and wild. Once, too, since his disaster, he had met her in India, travelling with her brother.

She was then seventeen, no less beautiful, even franker, and more daring. Whatever had passed between them, it was not he who had been the attacking party in that campaign. But, of course, he was no match for a Desmond, he had but his pay, a few hundreds a year, a good name with a bad stain upon it. They parted, and in truth she had not raised his opinion of the sex. He heard of her marriage a year or two later; a little gossip reached him too.

Their next meeting was in Cape Town. She met him as if not a day had elapsed since their parting. He was grizzled, older, a thousand times less easy or amenable, much more desirable, therefore. It was in the early days of the war, and no one foresaw the future. It was dull at Cape Town. Captain the Honourable Alec Lytham knew that his wife was at Cape Town; but he was at Bulawayo, and made no effort to join her. Colonel Fellowes had perforce to console her for the neglect.

When, many months afterwards, the two soldiers met at the siege of Ladysmith, in a situation when men speak truth to each other or stay silent, Fellowes spoke to Captain Lytham of his wife, of having met her in Cape Town.

"We may get out of this, though I doubt it. But if we do, or if we don't, it's all one to me as far as Lady Dorothea is concerned," the other replied, briefly. "She knew that before I left England; it was not me she followed. It probably was not only one man, either. There are women like that, Fellowes. You can't do anything for them; it is a question of temperament, I suppose, I should be sorry to judge harshly. I am not going to divorce her, she knows that, too. Probably this campaign will be the end, I am sure I hope so. Otherwise, if I get back and she wants a divorce, I'll contrive that no blame falls on her. But don't speak to me about my wife. I went through hell in the first year of my married life. I loved her," he added simply, as if that explained everything.

Colonel Fellowes had never had quite that with which to hurt his memory of Lady Dorothea. Love and marriage, as ordinary men understand them, were outside the prospects life held for him, after he had been dragged through the mire of the Brydges case.

When the South African War was over, and he went back to London, somewhat of a hero, with glamour enough about him to obliterate the follies of a boy of twenty-four, Lady Dorothea dragged him quickly back to the place from which he had started. It did not seem so murky to him now; in any case, he saw no escape into a clearer ether. He was tired, too, he had done his life's work, and all his fighting; he had lived down his ideals. He settled down to club life, lightened by a little dilettante collecting. He had companions in arms who gave him shooting and fishing in their different seasons. He was liked at the Rag; he had friends everywhere. The Brydges incident was forgotten, or, at any rate, the part he had played in it was ignored. His intimacy with Lady Dorothea Lytham,

neither made ridiculous by jealousy, nor prominent with scenes, became an accepted convention.

The Brydges case had been the talk of London, when Gilbert, Lord Kidderminster, was twelve months old. His father, the Marquis of Fortive, had only just come into the title he was to bear so becomingly. The house-party which had harboured the evil genius of Fellowes' life had been at Lady Fortive's. She was the same sweet, gracious lady that she is now, but younger, in better health, and devoted to her nursery. It was probably her love for her own baby boy that made her think more tenderly than other people of the grown-up one, who stood his ordeal in the witness-box, and his condemnation in the Press, and left England in the storm-cloud he had provoked.

It was in Egypt they next met, in the days before Lord Cromer's administration, and one of the highest official positions that England could bestow was vested in Lord Fortive.

There was no reason the Fortives should go out of their way to show kindness, or any social attention, to an obscure captain in the Lancers, more particularly when that officer had a shady reputation. Nevertheless the kindness was shown. Captain Fellowes was invited to tea, chosen as an escort for an expedition into the desert, made free of the Fortive quarters. He was very depressed in those days, full of ugly thought and harsh temper. He felt sometimes that it mattered very little what became of him, or of the lady he had shielded, that he would have done better to have accepted the proposal of Sir George Brydges' lawyers.

These ugly thoughts were gradually dispelled by Lady Fortive's gentleness and unspoken sympathy. He met in her a true gentlewoman, formed to be man's helpmate, gentle, yet strong. He envied her baby boy; he himself

had been orphaned so young. The impression she made was a lasting one. She had permitted, even encouraged, a correspondence. He had sought her out immediately he returned to England. That was when Lord Kidderminster had just left Eton. The Marquis of Fortive had, perhaps, proved a better statesman than husband. In any case, the love that Colonel Fellowes saw now in Lady Fortive's eyes was only mother-love, tender, anxious, absorbing. And it was of Gilbert they chiefly talked.

Gilbert was going up to Oxford. From Oxford he would, of course, come to London. In London he would need, not merely friends, but an adviser.

"There will be many temptations for him," the mother sighed:

"He has strength and character, he will surmount them," Colonel Fellowes replied, to reassure her.

"I know, I am quite sure. He has always been steady, the best of sons. . . ."

"But if there should come a time when I can be of use to him; by my memory of your sweetness to me, years ago, Lady Fortive, when I needed kindness so badly, worse than you know even — by the memory of that, I promise you, Gilbert shall be to me as if he were my younger brother. I will never lose sight of him, never be out of touch with him if I can help it, if he will allow it."

This was a few years ago. The Marchioness of Fortive had had her seasons in town, and Colonel Fellowes had attended her receptions. And Kiddie, her idolized Gilbert, had lived his town life, on the whole, temperately. The Colonel's brotherly eye had been little needed. He had won, and retained, the young man's confidence, friendship, and strong liking. He had, when the occasion served, reminded Lady Fortive that he was watching over Kiddie, that she had in him a trusty lieutenant, always at her service.

But until the day of Lady Dorothea Lytham's lunch-party in Curzon Street his services had never been necessary, nothing had been required of him. Now it was no longer so. He knew it, felt it instinctively, when he left Curzon Street that day, with the inevitable cigarette in his hand, and the almost equally inevitable question in his mind. What was he to do to keep Lady Fortive's boy from committing the folly he meditated? For, that Kiddie was meditating folly, Colonel Frederick Fellowes had no reasonable doubt.

There was little of the moralist about the Colonel. He had been through grave, stern moments, faced danger coolly, death unafraid. Death and suffering were familiar to him. He had led troops, and led them well, through the fire of hidden rifles, and long range of guns. He had helped to keep his country's flag flying when the flag was shaking in the wind of disaster. All this was serious. But woman's honour! that was mere piffle, a thing they sold or gave away, guarded for gain, or bartered for dross, lured with, lied about. Kiddie must not give away his strength for this, Kiddie must be saved.

Colonel Fellowes, having read Faust and known Lady Dorothea Lytham, was quite prepared to pursue the Mephistophelean policy. Kiddie, in the course of that rather heated after-luncheon argument, had dilated upon Miss Mainwaring's pride, her honest pride. She had said Kiddie had given her so much. Kiddie had laughed rather bitterly when this was repeated to him. He told the Colonel that he had taken her out to dinner, supper, lunch. She made a fuss even about that. At first she had almost insisted upon paying her half-share. Kiddie had not given her any jewellery; he was not going to insult her, he said, hotly.

But Colonel Fellowes did not think it insulting to give

a pretty girl a pretty chain. So, when he left Curzon Street, he went to Phillips'. That famous jewellery emporium was never over-crowded, there was always an assistant ready to attend to a customer's wants. And Colonel Fellowes was known as a customer; he was fond of *bibelots,* generous to a fault, and enjoyed buying pretty things.

The chain he had seen in the window was no great cost — forty-five pounds — but Colonel Fellowes made rather a wry face over the amount. It would make a hole in his spending money. But he understood what good value he was being offered, and, after a little argument, the purchase was completed, and he left the shop with the bauble in his pocket.

The name-board at Tillery Mansions informed him that Miss Sarita Mainwaring was at home.

When the lift deposited him at her flat, she opened the door to him herself, and told him that she had come home after the lunch-party to rest. Kiddie said she ought to rest in the middle of the day, but she hated "resting." In the sitting-room Colonel Fellowes found evidence of Sally's industry. She was making herself under-garments, and had no false shame about it.

"They're so much cheaper to make at home," she said, folding them neatly before putting them away. "I'll clear the table, and then I can get you some tea. It was very kind of you to come and see me so soon."

"It is a privilege to be allowed to come and see you," he said gallantly.

She laughed at that. He found her entirely unaffected, and even easier to talk to than she had been in Curzon Street. She liked this kind and handsome elderly gentleman. This was the point that escaped Colonel Fellowes. In the eyes of a girl of nineteen he was a very elderly

gentleman. She did not in the least realize that he was trying to make love to her, as he considered it his duty to do. She thought he was being kind, that Kiddie had asked him to be kind. She was delighted with the chain when he produced it. She tried it on before the glass, ran it through her fingers, put it against her cheek, and was over grateful and happy in its possession:

"It's so good of you, so awfully, awfully good of you. I don't know how to thank you. It will look so lovely on my grey dress. I can't believe it's really for me. . . ."

"It's very kind of you to accept it." The Colonel was perhaps a little old-fashioned. "I call it a privilege to be allowed to buy jewellery for pretty girls."

"Oh! I *do* hope it was not very expensive."

But Sally knew much more of the price of clothes than jewellery.

The Colonel reassured her on the score of expense. He stayed quite a long time, talking, paying her old-fashioned compliments, thinking he was making great headway with her, when she smiled and dimpled, and accepted these greedily. She liked praise.

The Colonel stayed until Edgar Levi came with some proofs from the photographers and an appointment with an interviewer. Edgar had arrived nearer to the truth of the position between Miss Mainwaring and Lord Kidderminster than any one else had done. He was not sure, but he suspected. Intuition stood him in place of knowledge, but it was brilliant intuition.

Meeting Colonel Fellowes here, his lightning mind darted hither and thither for explanation of his presence. And the Colonel quickly realized Edgar's interest, although he hardly knew whether it was on Sarita's account or his own. He kissed the girl's hand in farewell, he thanked her for accepting the chain. Instinctively he knew she

was a novice, yet concluded on the scanty evidence that she was eager to conclude her novitiate.

"That young ass has never tried her with jewellery," he said to himself, as he went downstairs. But he was sub-conscious of insincerity, and had an uneasy touch of pity for the inevitableness of it all. "Poor little girl, I believe she would run straight if she had half a chance" was in his mind.

But, after all, Kiddie, and not Miss Mainwaring, was his concern; before his cigarette was well alight his habitual mental attitude toward women had reasserted itself. The brand of the Verandah was upon her, she was hall-marked to her fate.

"What made him come?" asked Edgar, almost before the door had closed behind the Colonel.

"Kiddie asked him, I think. He was at Lady Dorothea Lytham's to-day, and so was I. . . ."

The whole story of the invitation and the luncheon-party came out; and the chain was exhibited.

"I've got my doubts," Edgar said to Tom that evening, when they saw, as usual, Lord Kidderminster waiting for the star, and carrying her off in his brougham. "I don't mind telling you, I've got my doubts, as to what's up between Miss Sarita Mainwaring and his lordship. It's not all such plain sailing as you seem to think."

He would have been even less sure of the relations between the pair could he have followed them into the brougham.

Kiddie had seen Colonel Fellowes again. In fact, in response to a somewhat insistent note, he had dined with him at his club, and been regaled, not with a dissertation upon Miss Sarita Mainwaring, but with a very shrewd, if a little trite, discourse upon women generally. Colonel Fellowes said they were only children, affectionate, light-

hearted, but "greedy, my dear boy, primevally greedy. They have their charm, their wonderful charm, and, of course, we can't do without them; we're bound to look after them, and give them things — dress, jewellery, flowers, toys — but not our souls, or too much of our hearts, our honour, or our responsibilities to play with."

There was no doubt that both Kiddie and the Colonel knew a disproportionate number of light women, women who were not light professionally, who were well born, well bred, well placed, but who were light, because, according to Colonel Fellowes, this was the distinguishing feature of the sex. In his middle-age he had become fond of talking of the Brydges case, and of his own connection with it. He talked of it now. He exemplified the three women who had been connected with it, and a fourth, who had disappeared, but had been subsequently traced. All of them were habitually up to the neck in intrigue.

"But you can't say *all* women are like that. Look at my mother, for instance," urged the boy, eating without appetite, drinking, thirstily, more than his share of the bottle of Pommery:

"Ah! there you are on different ground, on holy ground. But Lady Fortive is one in a thousand, one in a million."

"I don't believe it," Kiddie said, putting his glass down doggedly. "I'll grant you all you say about the women we know, but I think it's just accident that we know so many of the sort. I believe there are just as many women like my mother, if we could only get at them."

"Well, my boy, you let me know when you find one other, that's all, you let me know. And then I'll try her with jewellery for you." He laughed:

"It's a great test, the jewellery test. Goethe knew a thing or two."

Kiddie felt a pricking sensation about the hands; and

a great heat burned, increased in him, reddened his cheeks and brightened his eyes:

"You're hinting at Miss Mainwaring? You believe she would take jewellery from any fellow? . . ."

Colonel Fellowes did not want to say it. But Kiddie had set him thinking about Lady Fortive, she did not deserve to have a Verandah Theatre girl thrust upon her as daughter-in-law. It must not be. He, too, tossed off his glass:

"Miss Mainwaring did not make any bones about accepting a ruby chain from me this afternoon," he said, quietly.

Kiddie, too, became quiet under this blow, quiet and rather white. Colonel Fellowes did not like it; he felt definitely that he was behaving like a blackguard. Theoretically, this sort of thing was all very well, Kiddie was idealizing his ballet girl, and it is not safe for heirs to marquisates to idealize ballet girls. But practically Colonel Fellowes felt he was behaving like a blackguard.

He stood up, they were almost alone in the club dining-room, and he began to talk in a different key:

"Look here, Kiddie, now, don't get angry with me, I'm years older than you, I've knocked about the world, I've seen women, girls, in Egypt, India, in South Africa, of all sorts and colours; I know my subject. You are contemplating marrying this girl, breaking your mother's heart. . . ."

Kiddie's sunken head lifted.

"I don't see why . . ." he began.

"Let me speak, let me get out what I've got to say. I'm not even going to ask how you think your father will take it. No! the point is . . . it isn't good enough. You can get what you want from her without wrecking your life. There, it's not a thing one likes to say, but there is no use blinking it. And you are not free; there is your

mother, your father to think of, and all they expect from you. You have got a position to keep up. . . ."

"That's all rot, what good am I? You know I am no good. I've got no brains; the governor won't make anything of me by trying to shove me into the army, or the Diplomatic Service, or the House, do you think I don't know?"

"Well! If you are not a genius, if you are bound to be, to a certain extent, a disappointment to him, it doesn't follow that you need ask him to accept a daughter-in-law"—he hesitated a little, watching Kiddie—"off the stage."

Kiddie began walking about:

"You don't think I want to do it. . . . I know what you're driving at." He got very red, then a little white, hardened himself, and went on. "You think she will come and live with me. Well, she won't, that's flat." He got paler still. "I've tried her."

"But you have not given her any jewellery. What have you done for her, what have you offered her?"

"Oh, shut up."

Kiddie closed his ears; he did not know the depth of his own feeling yet, but he knew how this hurt. He had an ineffable tenderness for Sally, the sort of tenderness boys conceal under a certain gruffness, or rough badinage. It ached in him, it must be hidden, denied, concealed.

Colonel Fellowes had his say out. But when the evening was over, and they had separated, the Colonel to his rooms, Kiddie presumably to his, the stage-door of the Verandah still drew him irresistibly.

He found Sarita waiting for him; the Colonel had been a little garrulous, and he was later than usual. In the brougham he found it impossible to talk to her. He wanted to ask Sarita about Colonel Fellowes' visit, and

about the chain. But, in the end, he asked about neither.

He gave her supper at the Savoy. The red-shaded lamp between them accentuated her beauty, making it richer, fuller, more vivid. It made Kiddie look rather blotchy, and he was very silent. Sally thought he was, perhaps, a little fuddled with wine, she was only semi-educated, with her early experiences for teacher. She thought none the worse of Kiddie on this account, but was careful not to "upset him."

To-night Kiddie was feeling her charm in every throbbing pulse and breath of him. He could hardly bear to look at her. For, if Fellowes was right, she was still his for the taking. And if Fellowes was wrong . . . ? He knew she was different from any girl he had ever met. His mother was so wide-minded, so unprejudiced; he recalled her letter. If there was no other way . . . as he looked at Sally, although to-night he could hardly bear to look at her, he knew, if there were no other way, Sally must be Lady Kidderminster. He was not going to do without her; he had not been brought up to do without things.

He felt fiercely about her to-night. When Jerry and Clive came over to talk to her, although Jerry and Clive were pals, and had been at all the theatrical suppers, he scowled at them, and mentally "damned" their impudence. He was impatient with everything they said, and showed his impatience. That made Clive have his chair brought over, and join them for coffee, chaffing Kiddie, as in the old Eton days, commenting on his want of hospitality. When the semi-darkness set in, they turned out the greater part of the electric light at twelve o'clock, in accordance with some socialistic law, Kiddie's silence became yet more marked.

"You're tired, aren't you?" Sally said, when they were

groping their way out. "Don't come all the way with me to-night. Let me take a cab, I'll get along all right."

"I dare say! Perhaps you'd like Clive to see you home?" he answered rudely. Confirmed in her suspicion as to his condition, Sally shrugged her shoulders, smiled, and said nothing.

In the brougham again, he felt sorry he had spoken so impatiently; it was this acute tenderness that was torturing him.

"I say, you mustn't take any notice of what I say to-night; I'm out of sorts."

"Oh, I don't mind; you ought to take a long sleep in the morning, that's what father used to do."

"Sarita!"

Kiddie tried to take her hand; his own were very hot. She surrendered her hand, and it lay cool and supine in his. Then she yawned, not deliberately, but because she was tired:

"Don't try and get talking," she said; "it's best to sleep it off."

"I can't sleep it off. . . . I can't get any sleep," he began passionately.

But her merry laugh was like a cold douche.

"Not sleep! Well! I like that. You could hardly keep awake at supper. Here we are. I am glad to be home. What a day it's been—a hundred hours in it. Don't get out."

She turned the handle, jumping out lightly. She had rung for the lift before he had collected himself. There was no way to touch or hold her to-night; her youth was too slippery, it gave no foothold. Perhaps she was acting a little, she seemed less natural than usual as she stood waiting for the lift, perhaps she saw the danger-signal in his eyes. She was in the lift, and mounting out of his

sight, when this thought suddenly struck him. Her elusiveness became a new lure.

"I'll be with you early in the morning. I want to speak to you," he shouted after her. It was undignified, but his dignity had left him. He was fearfully excited, uncertain of her, or of himself, intensely bent now on his own way. Colonel Fellowes had achieved nothing. The game, had she but known it, lay entirely in the unpractised hands of Miss Sarita Mainwaring.

CHAPTER XVII

DAY dawned, and was still young when it found Lord Kidderminster in Sally's sitting-room. Kiddie was very jumpy this morning. He had a desperate desire to believe that Freddy Fellowes was right, and that he had not sufficiently forced the running with Sarita. He let himself go this morning, and he succeeded in transferring a modicum of his trouble to Sarita, breaking up her happy thoughtlessness of security. More than once he induced her to kiss him.

He left her, indeed, before that day ended, with her brave spirit wavering, and her child's mind aflame. His own heart was thumping with a sense of coming triumph. He saw well enough what he had done, and yet he was not entirely happy. His small success had meant her distress, and his own doubts.

In truth, the enemy was no longer quite outside the citadel. They were only boy and girl; there was little to set them apart. Social differences had been forgotten between them, and he had been a good companion to her, hardly cleverer, little more cultivated, barely more experienced than herself. Unconsciously Sally had grown to care for him. He had had her taught to ride, and talked of the exhilaration of hunting. He had taught her to drive, she had felt the generous tug of the horses, and her girl's hand guiding them. All these pleasures had come from Kiddie, so much had come from Kiddie. She had the

great quality of gratitude, and was quickly appreciative This morning he told her she was making him unhappy, ruining his life. Perhaps something spoke within her this time; when he kissed her she no longer resisted him. He knew she was fond of him.

The days went on. If Lady Dorothea had not interfered, if no one had interfered, it is difficult to say what might have happened. The club world, and the theatre world, knew that Lord Kidderminster was "running" the new *danseuse* at the Verandah. The Press knew it, too, but faithful to its best tradition, the Press kept silent. Between the two young people there was a nameless excitement, a strange intimacy, a stranger silence; and every day was too short for them.

"Don't stay in town over Sunday," Kiddie said to her, with eyes averted, voice thick and strangled, "let's go down to Brighton for the week-end. I'll fetch you in the new six-cylinder, after the play. We can do Brighton in a couple of hours; the night journey will be rather fine. You love the sea, don't you?"

The spring of the year was in the air, and spring was in both their hearts.

"Not this Sunday, not this very next Sunday." That had always been Sarita's answer.

But her eyes had lost all their gladness, and were strained, and startled, her laugh had lost its crispness. Her dance had improved, the music in it, and the poetry of it, seemed to have more meaning. She was only quite happy when she was dancing; it carried her outside herself, outside all those thoughts that could not be long absent when Kiddie was so constantly with her. He was very good to her, she wished he was not so . . . so restless.

The next Sunday again she put him off. But perhaps she would always have put him off. This time she said it

was because she had invited company. Mary and Alf were coming to see her, she wanted very badly to see them, so Kiddie must do without her. The day seemed very long to him, extraordinarily long, and there was nothing to which to look forward in the evening! He thought it a cursed arrangement that the theatres did not open on Sundays.

Sally made quite a little gala for her expected visitors. She ordered a special dinner of fowls and a ham, an apple pudding, and some Stilton cheese. Kiddie knew all about Alf and Mary. He wanted to be asked to meet them at dinner, but Sally knew they would be happier without him. She wrote, however, a very pretty little letter, fairly well spelt, entreating Ursula Rugeley to the feast, and that lady, although not accepting for dinner, promised to come in the course of the afternoon.

It was the first party Sally had given, and she was very excited about it; she was easily excitable now. Kiddie had filled the place with flowers, but Sally put half of them away. It was her old life she was hankering after, groping for, she was trying to regain the secure foundations that had been hers. Everything had been shifting in these strange few weeks, she felt giddy, and as if her feet were not firm on the ground. But all her sensations were confused. She was never quite without the memory of Kiddie's kisses. She was never quite happy away from him, nor with him, although she did not want him with Mary and Alf, nor with Ursula Rugeley. She wanted to hear her old friends talk to her, and to each other. She wanted to get back to simplicity, to the time when neither thought nor sensation was confused. They must not talk to her of her life, nor of the theatre, but of themselves, of the factory. She thought that would cure her of her giddiness and confusion.

Mary looked quite pretty in her pink cotton blouse, and the large hat with its white feather. As she kissed Sally she exclaimed:

"What a fuss they make of you! I never! Alf and me went to see you last night. You didn't know we were in the house, did you? We tried to get round to the stage-door, but there was such a crowd. I say, what furniture, and a piano! Alf, do you see the piano?"

"I don't suppose any one was gladder than me and Mary to know how you'd come along, and to hear them clapping you. Charlie would have been proud, too," Alf added, his face clouding.

Sally reddened.

"Don't talk to me about Mr. Peastone," she said quickly.

"Oh, God! if he should have been right!" whispered a voice from the innermost recesses of her heart.

"Tell me what's going on at the factory, and what's Luke Cullen and all of you doing; and have you fixed up anything yet about a house?"

She talked more than she used, and yet they did not think she was so gay. She took Mary into her bedroom.

"I say, you have got things about you, toney things," said Mary, who loved the walnut furniture and the brass bed. She was not exactly envious, because, of course, whatever else Sally had, she had not got Alf. But Mary's mind was on furniture, on little but furniture just now, and it was natural she should look about her.

"How your hair has come on," said Sally, when Mary had taken off her hat before the walnut swing-mirror.

Mary, combing out her crimped fringe, smiled complacently at her reflection:

"It's happiness, my dear. It's been growing ever since me and Alf walked out together. Alf says it's too fine, that's all the matter with it. I've left off all them stuffs,

and it grows better without them; it's half-way down my waist now." She was quite prepared to exhibit it.

"Don't you pull it down, you've done it up so nice. It *is* soft."

"I know, of course, it's not quite so much as yours, but then, yours *is* coarse."

Sally laughed.

"You know it is," insisted Mary, in the old manner.

"Never you mind about my hair, come and look at the bathroom; there is hot and cold, and nobody else can use it, it's all mine. Shall I turn it on and show you?"

Mary told of a flat she and Alf had seen at Dalston. She hadn't thought of a flat, but Alf's mother suggested it. Now she had seen Sally's, she should go again.

"But it must cost you an awful lot. What are you getting, Sal? Nobody seems to know. Alf says you ought to be putting something by. Dancing is not like making jam and pickles, people never get tired of jam and pickles; there's always work to be had there."

Sally found Mary rather dull. She hurried over her dressing so that they might join Alf. The dinner was rather long in coming, but Alf carved beautifully, and Mary admired him all the time. It all came out during dinner. The banns had been called once. Alf and Mary were really going to get married in a few weeks, and go to Eastbourne, for a week-end, for their honeymoon. They were going to start their married life living with Alf's mother. She had a shop at Dalston, a little grocery shop, and that was why they had looked at a flat in Dalston. But the flat must be for the future. For the present, there was Mrs. Stevens' spare room, and the furniture Alf was going to put in it. Mary had much to tell of Mrs. Stevens, and her kindness, of what Alf had said on this, that, or the other occasion, of what she intended to wear at her

wedding, and what the girls at the factory said in their jealousy at her good luck in getting Alf.

Sally was interested in it all; they took it for granted that she would be. Mary showed openly that Alf was as a god in her eyes. It was all right to show how much you cared for the man who was going to be your husband. And Alf Stevens was a good little fellow. Not like some one Sarita knew, not tall, and straight, and strong, with eyes that set your heart beating, and a voice you heard all through you. But a nice little man all the same; he and Mary would be very happy. All in a whirl went Sally's thoughts again.

"Tell me some more, Mary," she said, to steady herself, "go on talking. I do like to hear it all."

The waits between the fowls and the pudding, the pudding and the cheese, were all too short. Sometimes Sally thought it dull, and her thoughts wandered. Sometimes she thought she could never tire of hearing Mary and Alf talk, of seeing them hold each other's hands, and pass titbits to each other on the same fork. She promised to go to the wedding. She wanted Mary to be married from her flat; but Mary said the arrangements were all made. Mrs. Stevens had made them, and she mustn't be upset, she'd been so kind. Alf was going to pay his mother a pound a week for the two of them; he'd only been giving her twelve-and-six for himself. Mary went into many details.

At four o'clock Miss Rugeley came. Sally was glad when Mary and Alf left her alone with her kind friend. The young couple had promised to go to Mrs. Stevens' for tea, and they mustn't disappoint Mrs. Stevens!

But when Sally found herself alone with Miss Rugeley, it seemed she had nothing to say to her. So she suggested tea; rang for what she wanted, made it, and poured it out, cutting the bread and butter thin, and handing the cake:

"How nicely you do everything now," Ursula said.

"Not well enough," she answered quickly.

"*Not well enough for what, for whom?*"

Again the red flushed in her cheeks. Yet how could her old friend guess she was thinking how much better Lord Kidderminster must have seen tea served!

Presently Ursula began to question her about her companions, and her daily life at the theatre. Sally's candour halted, her truthfulness faltered:

"It's nearly all work, rehearsals and dancing lessons, and singing lessons."

"I still wish you had been in Mr. Benson's company, or at His Majesty's, or the Haymarket. I never like to think of your dancing in public."

"There is no harm in dancing."

The tea-making was done and the tray put neatly outside. Now Sally sat on the hearth-rug in front of the fire, and Ursula, from her easy chair, looked down at her with tender interest. She knew, none better, how straight and simple Sally was. But even Ursula Rugeley had heard that the young ladies on the musical comedy stage were not always thoroughly respectable. She had come principally to talk about that to Sally; not exactly to warn her, but to beg her to be careful about her companions, to offer her own companionship to Sally for any unoccupied hours. A hesitant word brought Sally's quick reply:

"The girls are good enough, Miss Rugeley. They're just like me, working hard, taking a bit of fun if it comes our way. Most of them have got friends," . . . then she paused:

"Other girls?"

"No, fellows, 'boys,' they call them, but they're mostly grown up."

"Young men to whom they are engaged?"

Sally hesitated, staring into the fire.

"No, not exactly engaged."

"With whom they walk out?"

Ursula had learnt the language of the people she served.

"I shouldn't call it that. They're nice fellows, most of them. They give the girls dinners, or suppers, sometimes a dress, or a bit of jewellery. . . ."

"Surely girls ought not to take presents from young men! Unless, of course, they are going to marry them?"

"They're good girls, quite good girls," Sally persisted, still staring into the fire. "There's Milly and Ada, and the other two in the quartette; they help their people a lot, almost all their screw goes in it. They'd have nothing but work if it weren't for their 'boys.' As it is, they get to the Carlton and the Savoy, and Romano's, instead of only to tea-shops by themselves. Milly has got a beautiful ring, and a watch with her name in diamonds. Her 'boy' is in the Guards, but he's only a lieutenant. Sir John Delorme takes Ada about, his wife is in the South of France. He's awfully good to her; she's much older than me, but she says she's never had such a pal. They're real good girls, Miss Rugeley," earnestly. Then she said, in a lower voice: "There are some other ones . . . not so good, perhaps! It's very difficult. . . ."

The district visitor grew chilled. But Sally must not see that she was startled at what she heard. She must obtain, and retain, the girl's confidence. Ursula, having learnt broad charity late, and with infinite difficulty, hoped that all Sally told her was true, and these girls were as good as she described.

"It can't be right for them to accept presents," she repeated, after a pause. "It must destroy their independence, their self-respect."

"Why shouldn't we take from those who've got more than we have — seeing how they like giving?" Sally asked defiantly, almost violently.

And Ursula knew, all at once, knew, in that luminous, small soul of hers, that Sally was asking for help, for guidance. She prayed before she answered, those wordless prayers good women so often put up out of church. "*Help me to help her, O Christ,*" was what she prayed. And her maidenhood, old as it was, and withered, shrank from the thoughts she must think, fearful how to cloak them. And she was ashamed, for she knew Sally's purity. She had to fight her own fight before speech came.

Meanwhile Sally's bright eyes watched the flames, on her lips she felt Kiddie's kisses, and his brooch burned at her throat, that brooch he had given her but yesterday.

"If you take these good gifts, there is a chance, a possibility, you may be asked . . . for some return." Ursula's shrunk cheeks had a painful pink, and her voice was low. But Sally heard.

"You can't take everything, and give nothing. What you have to give is very precious."

Then Sally's eyes flashed their question to her.

"Is it?" she cried, "is it?"

And then she hid her face quite suddenly, and began to cry. It was the first time Ursula Rugeley had seen Sally cry. She had seen her cold, and known her hungry, but always she had been so strong.

Ursula put her hand on the red head, softly, tenderly, praying all the time, inwardly, for help. She was so ignorant of this kind of struggle.

"Poor Sally," were all the words she had — trembling words — "poor Sally."

"I won't be pitied."

The girl's head went up, and she spoke passionately. "I can take care of myself." It was the old brave war-cry, although Ursula could now hear a weakness in it.

"I know, I know you can," the old maid answered, tremulously.

"He likes me better nor anything. Why shouldn't he give me things?"

Ursula's tremulous lips opened and closed.

"*Help me to help her, O God,*" she was praying all the time.

"You are so young . . ." she stammered.

"He's not more than twenty-three himself." Sally took her courage in both hands. "It isn't as if he doesn't care for me. And he'll look after me always. I can't never go back to the factory, or to the tailoring; and they mayn't always like my dancing," she faltered.

"Oh, Sally! and once you were so proud!"

That cry was involuntary, but no studied speech could have been more effectual.

"Proud I was, was I?" Sally's eyes shone questioningly. "But this doesn't seem like being proud, it seems like being mean. He only wants me to love him, sometimes I think I do! And he wants me always to be with him. . . ."

"Giving up your independence?"

"I need not go off the stage altogether."

It was Ursula Rugeley who cried now, the dry old maid, and Sally who comforted her.

"Oh, Miss Rugeley, and you've been so good to me too, times and times again! I didn't go for to hurt you, you know I didn't. I won't do anything you don't like. Give over crying, tell me what I must do. I know I can't stay on here . . . and see him every day, and take things from him. I don't want to go with him . . . I want to be free, and keep myself respectable. But I do like him, I do! Oh! help me."

They clung to each other a minute. Sally had never been so demonstrative.

Ursula, too, who had never known petting, found loving, gentle things to say. Sally had always been so good, so steady. Ursula had been so proud of her. She could never do a thing like this; Ursula would think of a way, she was sure she could think of a way.

"Oh, Sally, dear Sally, chastity is enjoined on us; it would break my heart if you fell away from it. You shall never want, I promise you that."

The emotional part of the interview lasted so short a time. Neither of them was given to emotion. Sally got up from the hearthrug quite soon and began to clear away the tea-things. If her eyes showed signs of weeping, they were, nevertheless, brighter, and they saw more clearly than they had done for many weeks.

Those prayers had all been heard, the words had come for which Ursula asked. They had been few, weak and feeble they seemed to her, but they had gone straight home. Yes; Sally saw more clearly now. She would never be Lord Kidderminster's mistress. She was proud, she did respect herself, she could do without any one.

They talked of quite commonplace matters for a little while. Then Sally put on her outdoor things, and walked with Miss Rugeley to meet the omnibus. Neither of them spoke again of what had so greatly moved both. Ursula did not ask from whom Sally's temptation came, it was not that way she had gained the girl's confidence.

"This is your 'bus," Sally said, hailing the lumbering, yellow conveyance.

"Yes, so it is. Well, good-bye, dear. . . . I wish, I wish I could have helped you more."

"I'm all right. I really am all right now." Sally smiled through a mist, but still she smiled. "Never you fear, you've helped me a lot."

CHAPTER XVIII

KIDDIE spent that dull Sunday less profitably. He bored himself for a good many hours during "church parade," and sitting through a dull luncheon-party at Lady Cleeve's. Afterwards he went to call on Lady Dorothea.

Her room was full of visitors, but he found their chatter depressing and commonplace. When the crowd cleared off a little, Dorothea beckoned him nearer to her, and began to rally him. She had recently heard the whispers at the clubs, the jests behind the scenes:

"Come and tell me all about it, Kiddie. I'm dying to hear."

"All about what?" he said sullenly, moving nearer to her, however, with something like an appeal in his eyes. He did not want to be chaffed, yet he longed for some one to whom he could talk, in whom he might confide. But there was no softness of comprehension about Lady Dorothea:

"About the flat," she said boldly. "Oh! I know all about it, everybody knows. But *why* did you take a flat in Victoria? It might just as well be Bloomsbury. Of course, when I went there, I had no idea it was your show! Who would have dreamt of your setting up house in Tillery Mansions? You really are unconventional, Kiddie, you do impossible things. Belgravia, now, or St. John's Wood, if you must have a flat. But Victoria. . . ."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Well, considering I introduced you. . . ."

"If you're talking about Miss Mainwaring," he began, very hot and confused at the sudden attack.

She laughed, she called Colonel Fellowes into the conversation.

"Kiddie doesn't know that all London is talking about his *liaison* with the new dancer at the Verandah," she said, with that coarse gaiety of hers, the Desmond heritage and privilege.

Kiddie lost his temper:

"You know you are saying what isn't true. She's the best and sweetest, and cleanest-minded, and purest girl I've met since I've been in London," he broke out with. "You may jeer, so may Fellowes. . . ."

They were neither of them discreet, he in his cynical smile, she in her quick retort. It ended in Kiddie's exclaiming:

"If it were not for the governor I'd marry her tomorrow."

"And break your mother's heart," interposed the Colonel, startled out of raillery.

Kiddie had not been thinking lately of marrying Miss Sarita Mainwaring. All his dreams and waking hours had been filled differently. But that Dolly should attack Sarita's virtue, Dolly, for whom his contempt, notwithstanding her favours, was too deep for words, hurried him into unconsidered speech.

Dorothea was amazed when Kiddie dashed away from Curzon Street in a rage with her, with himself, and everything. Colonel Fellowes was made uneasy by his attitude, and Dorothea was more sympathetic with his fears than she had been with Kiddie. Very hurriedly they decided Lord Fortive must be informed, a letter must be written to him. The final completed missive, however, was Lady Dorothea's. She forced her views on her perturbed but

more cautious companion. "Leave it to his people," she said; "we'll let them know what is going on, and put it up to them to take action."

"Dear Uncle," she wrote, "how would it be to get Gilbert out of London for a bit? A word to the wise will, I know, be sufficient for you, for you are so very wise. And I'm sure you don't want a daughter-in-law whose high kick is her great claim to social recognition! Seriously, I think Kiddie is within an ace of making a fool of himself. . . ."

Then the letter branched off into messages for Lady Fortive, and some wholly apocryphal allusions to Captain the Hon. Alec Lytham. The separation was still unacknowledged. Lady Dorothea was living under the shelter of the honourable name for which she had exchanged her own.

Parliament was not sitting, and Lord Fortive was enjoying a limited leisure in the South when Dorothea's letter was forwarded to him. Kiddie had never given him a moment's uneasiness; but then, it was not Lord Fortive's way to be uneasy about small events. Anything that was not statecraft was "small events" to the distinguished diplomat. Lady Fortive was with him, also one of his married daughters. Their villa was a large one, almost outside Monte Carlo itself, on the road to Cap Martin. Roses and carnations overhung the stone balustrade; orange trees, bearing their golden burden, lemons, and flowering oleanders diversified the waving palms. From the breakfast-room window one saw the dark blue of the Mediterranean, the stiller, vaguer blue of the clear sky.

Lord Fortive, grey, erect, and distinguished, came in first to breakfast. Lady Fortive was wheeled in afterwards, and their daughter was late, as usual. Lord Fortive gave the ladies a little Monte Carlo news. He had

been in the rooms last night, on the terrace already this morning. There was quite a crowd on the terrace, two of the Grand Dukes were at Monte, and Duke Barkoff was expected from Cannes, where, under the pretence of benefiting the town by a golf course, he was laying out for himself an extensive pleasaunce. Lord Fortive spoke of this, and of Duke Barkoff's pavilion in the middle of the golf course! Lord Fortive had a sense of humour, and the Englishman's appreciation of equality in sport. The private pavilion, the lunches that were served there, and Duke Barkoff's prowess at golf, were all commented upon lightly.

"Did you play with him?" asked Hildegarde.

Hildegarde had made a very great match; a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire had not disdained an alliance with the Fortives. But Hildegarde was generally to be found at the Villa Bella Vista in the winter, at Buckminster in the summer, pleading, if pleading were necessary, her mother's health, to excuse her absence from the Prince's side. They were seen together sometimes, in the London season, or the Roman, on excellent terms.

"Did you play with Duke Barkoff?" Hildegarde asked. "I suppose his golf is not exactly first-class?"

"Yes! I have played with him." Lord Fortive was a diplomatist. "His handicap is eighteen; a courtesy eighteen, I should call it."

"Who played with you?"

"It was a single, on a pouring wet morning. Captain Martyn, the secretary, arranged it, and one could not, of course, refuse, although — " he added contemplatively, buttering his toast, "I should have preferred stopping in the club house, and reading the papers."

"I hope you won." Hildegarde passed him the marmalade.

"Yes, I won, rather to the disgust of the caddies, I fear."

"Can't he play at all?"

"He is painstaking, but length is not his strong point."

"He has plenty of length of his own," interpolated Hildegarde quickly.

"He seems stiff, no body spring," Lord Fortive went on complacently, not heeding the interruption. Golf was his one weakness, he liked dwelling upon the technique of the game, he prided himself on his style: "He hits, rather than drives the ball; he plays from his elbows." Lord Fortive was on his favourite hobby, but he pulled himself up. "Anyway, he derives amusement from it, and that is the main thing."

"Although you derived little from playing with him?"

"I won't say that. Amusement, of a kind, I certainly found. Both my caddie and his, the secretary too, if I am not mistaken, gave him a perfect salvo of applause at one drive. He used his cleek at the eleventh tee, and just carried the bunker."

"But surely that is the short hole! It isn't eighty yards."

"Still he got on the green." Lord Fortive's smile was whimsical.

"Did you lunch at that queer little hedged-in loggia of his?"

"Yes, and in the middle of the round! It seemed curiously remote; he was at his best then, neither restless nor reticent; he talked with freedom, certainly with charm."

"And the food?"

"Ah! I would give all his golf for one of his sauces."

There followed a description of the food, with reminis-

cences of the conversation. Lord Fortive liked talking, and his women folk were trained to listen.

Lord Fortive was too intelligent to allow the postman to interfere with his meals. After the very excellent *déjeuner*, he adjourned to the garden for his cigar. It was nearly two o'clock before he repaired to his study and summoned his secretary.

The letters were all neatly divided — affairs of state, business matters, newspapers, and some few delicately-scented missives with sprawling addresses. Lord Fortive had never been a Stoic, and his wife was an invalid. But he knew how to keep his pleasures subordinate to his position; he had never taken any risks. He was not a man of strong temperament, and his brain had always dominated his body. He had been known to dictate his love letters, or what passed for love letters, having perfect confidence in his secretary. But then he had perfect confidence in most of his subordinates, including his children. Men of affairs have this habit; it saves them time and thought.

When he came to Dorothea's letter, however, he read it through twice.

"Silly woman!" he said. "Dorothea has always been a silly woman." Then he dictated the reply:

"My dear Niece,

"I am very grateful to you for your letter and the feeling that has prompted it. I will make myself acquainted with the causes of your kind anxiety, and act accordingly. In the meantime, let me beg you not to concern yourself too deeply with Gilbert's affairs. The young lady may kick high, but I doubt if she will kick away my boy's good sense and good feeling, and the knowledge of what he owes to his

position. I should hesitate before I interfered in his legitimate amusements. The theatre is one of Gilbert's legitimate amusements. . . ."

The letter went on, half bantering, giving the details asked for of Lady Fortive's health, and making perfunctory acknowledgment of Captain Lytham's invented compliment.

"You had better write to Lord Kidderminster, too," Lord Fortive said to the secretary, glancing at the letter again:

"DEAR GILBERT,

"Dorothea writes me you have fallen in love. Very proper, I'm sure. I did the same thing myself at your age; she didn't dance, she sang. It is a much quicker cure. However, I don't want to interfere with you in any way. I will admit I don't care for quite so much publicity as your cousin implies, but I presume she has become acquainted with your movements by accident? I know I can trust you to do the right thing. And, by the way, if my memory serves me, it is rather an expensive game you are learning. I hope the enclosed may be of service to you. Be discreet, and, if I may advise you, avoid anything in the nature of a permanent tie. *Verb sap.* I suppose you will come out to us presently. Your mother seems much improved in health. I've not told her of Dorothea's letter, but you might write her yourself, announcing a visit, if a visit be agreeable to you. . . ."

Lord Fortive was a diplomat, a man of the world, attached to his son, although he was also his heir, and grateful to him for his decent record. Other fathers of

his acquaintance had trouble with their sons. He had had no trouble. He even boasted about it, putting it to his own credit:

"I've always treated my son on a rational principle, encouraging him to look upon me as his friend and equal. I don't issue orders, I discuss circumstances. Gilbert has been brought up to think for himself, to realize that I am at his service if he requires guidance; but mainly to think and act for himself."

But Lady Fortive knew that boys do not confide everything even to the most rational of fathers. Hence her occasional anxieties and her early appeal to Colonel Fellowes.

The immediate effect of his father's letter was a most explosive interview between Dorothea and her cousin. Lord Fortive could never have conceived Gilbert being guilty of such a misprision of confidence, or he would not have written him so openly. But then Lord Fortive was cautious, Kiddie frank; Lord Fortive a diplomat, Gilbert — a boy.

"I think it is a dirty trick, neither more, nor less," Kiddie reproached her hotly. He had not given himself time to think, he was at Curzon Street before Dorothea was up. At his urgent message she came down in her *peignoir* to meet his reproaches. The white tea-gown, embroidered in a gold-key pattern, became her as well as any of her more elaborate dresses. Her coiffure was perfection.

"What have I done now? What's a dirty trick? Really, Kiddie, you have the strangest way of saying good morning. And I was going to invite you to breakfast with me. Don't tornade, now please don't tornade. . . ." She liked the new word, and repeated it. "What has happened? What does the diplomat write?"

"I say again, it's a dirty trick. What did you write to my father for? How dared you interfere with me?

It's a silly, womanish, spiteful thing to do. I didn't think you capable of it."

"Now, Kiddie, it's time you talked sense, instead of standing there glowering at me, abusing me as if I were a pickpocket. All London is gossiping about you and Miss Mainwaring. In a gossiping letter I mentioned what all the world knows. . . ."

"My father writes you are anxious about me! Now, what do you mean by that?" But unconsciously the Greek tea-gown was mollifying him.

"I *am* anxious about you."

"Oh, damn it, . . .!"

"That is simply rude. How can I help it? I'm very fond of you, Kiddie."

Kiddie did not want to be softened. Still, when a woman, a beautiful one, one with whom he has had passages, tells a young man she is fond of him, it is difficult to abuse her for it.

"I've always been fond of you. And I can't let you go on with this without trying to prevent it getting serious. Everybody is talking, they say you are going to marry her!"

"Rot!"

"But you told me so yourself two or three days ago."

"You goaded me into saying it."

"But isn't it true?"

"I don't know. Oh, damn it; don't cross-examine a fellow."

"I see you've already adopted the manners of the lower orders."

"Dolly!"

He came up to her, he even put his arm about her.

"Don't nag me, Dolly. I came round to have a row with you, but I don't want to. I'm half beside myself. I don't

know what I'm saying. I *am* in love with her; what's the good of denying it? She . . . she won't have anything to do with me. . . ."

This was not the exact truth. But Sally's Monday demeanour had very definitely reflected her Sunday decision. She had come into something of her woman's kingdom, she knew she would not be Kiddie's mistress. She wanted to go on being friends with him. She had not taken sufficient possession of that kingdom to realize the impossibility of what she proposed. Other girls on the musical comedy stage had "friends."

But Kiddie was all on fire with her; his days and nights were full of nothing else. He thought he had seen an end to his trouble, but now there was to be no end.

It is difficult to get at Lady Dorothea's motive. Perhaps she wanted to secure Kiddie's gratitude. She had no opinion of virtue as a quality. To her it was merely an idiosyncrasy, rather rare, and not admirable. Kiddie quite broke down before her. He was leading an impossible life, and it was telling on his health and nerves. A thought slowly dawned on her, the germ of one at least. She hesitated, the thing did not come to her all at once.

"Do you think it would do any good if Lord Fortive were to meet her?" she said slowly, to gain time. She had an idea, but it would not materialize. There must be some way of giving Kiddie what he wanted. Poor Kiddie!

"Do you mean would he consent to my marrying her?"

"Well, would he consider it at all?"

"He's the soul of pride," said Kiddie disconsolately.

"But she is rather attractive."

"You mean he might take a fancy to her?"

"You know he is not generally considered to be quite adamant."

"I know he is the best father a fellow ever had."

"Well, would you like to try the experiment of an introduction?"

"I'm desperate. I'd try anything. What have you got in your mind?"

"Well! Be a good boy. . . ."

Kiddie laughed at that, but it wasn't a pleasant laugh:

"I'll pay anything you like, if that's what you mean." It was a formula to which she had used him.

"As it happens, that is not what I mean."

The idea suddenly materialized and became a brilliant inspiration. He should have what he wanted, she would be the goddess in the car. He would be grateful to her. And, later on, a good many tradespeople would be grateful to him. Lady Dorothea was nothing if not practical.

"I'm sick of Curzon Street, Kiddie, I want a change. Now what would you do for me if I took her over to Monte with me and introduced her to them as if she were my bosom friend? I can't go alone, . . . what a young brute you are, Kiddie."

For Kiddie had kissed her enthusiastically; she liked that sort of thing done gently, with premeditation, *her* premeditation, and when she was in the mood. Kiddie did not heed her remonstrance.

"You wouldn't do it, Dolly; you wouldn't do it, would you? You are a ripper. I wish I'd been better to you. It's a grand scheme, magnificent. You won't tell them anything about her. You'll let them get to know her. Oh, Dolly!"

"Mind you, it's not going to be a cheap piece of foolery. . . ."

"I've got plenty of money; the governor sent me five hundred pounds this morning."

"I want clothes, and she'll want clothes."

"Oh, that's nothing."

"And how about her engagement at the theatre?"

"I can get that through all right."

There were no obstacles which, in Kiddie's opinion, could not be easily overcome. He had never asked Sarita Mainwaring to marry him. But he knew that life was flavourless to him without her. He had sincerely at heart the feelings of his father and his mother, the honour of his name, and the guarding of his position. He would let his parents see Sally, and judge her. Love blinded him to her little lapses from the conventional, and she was always improving. Love blinded him to everything but what love makes clear, her loyalty and simplicity, her fine courage and capacity. He saw quite well the strength with which she was resisting him. And now he knew, or almost knew, what before he had doubted, and doubted correctly. She was not indifferent to him, he was not only an acquaintance to her. Her eyes told him this sometimes, and her quick breathing; she was no longer a child, nor was she cold. However feebly his love had been rooted four weeks ago, now it had put out tendrils which held securely, it was supported by the sturdy staff of his respect, and it flowered.

Dolly's proposal carried him off his feet, the flood of opportunity it presented drowned his common sense. He saw himself escorting Lady Dorothea Lytham with a companion upon whom no one would look askance; he pictured Sally sitting by his invalid mother's chair. How quickly his mother would guess! And Sally's charm, surely her extraordinary charm, would soften and conquer his father. They need not know for a long time who Sarita was, or that she had been on the stage. Meanwhile Dolly would think of some evasive explanation. At twenty-two the gates of Utopia are easily unlocked, and youth is prone to react. Quite long enough Kiddie had

been depressed, uncertain, ill at ease. Now his spirits mounted sky high.

They carried him through the next few days; extraordinary days they were. Edgar and Tom said he would ruin "In Far Cathay." Kiddie was ready to pay for rebuilding the ruin. Sarita said she was not going to leave the Verandah, even for a fortnight. She was in debt, and would not involve herself further by ordering more clothes. But she was secretly enamoured of the idea. The prospect of change and novelty, of being with Kiddie and Lady Dorothea Lytham, set her eyes dancing. Lady Dorothea Lytham had never lost her fascination since that visit to the hospital. Yet Sally demurred, denied, refused, until Kiddie was driven to bring Dorothea to her.

Dorothea came, bringing with her the subtle odour of Bond Street and authority.

"Kiddie tells me you won't go to Monte Carlo with me."

"Oh, no, milady," she protested in an agony of distress, lest she should have denied anything to this beautiful lady, or appeared ungracious to her; "only I didn't think — I couldn't believe that your ladyship meant it."

"Not so much of 'your ladyship,' please. You are coming as my companion, not as my maid. Has Kiddie told you the scheme?"

Kiddie had told her nothing. The word "marriage" had not been mentioned between them, nor had they discussed his parents' inevitable way of regarding such a union. Sally was proud, and Kiddie knew the quality of her pride. She would not go to Monte Carlo if she realized she was to go there "on appro," as it were, as so many of the goods were sent out from the emporium in Brook Street. They came back so often damaged, worse than shop-worn, unsaleable. She would not have consented to go on such conditions. By a gesture Kiddie restrained Lady Dorothea from expatiating

on their conspiracy. For it was in the nature of a conspiracy, although far from being the one that Kiddie imagined.

Sarita's opposition overcome, there remained only the consultation with Mr. Perry. It was Lady Dorothea's advice that Sally should buy clothes in Paris. They meant to break the journey at Paris, and two or three days' shopping there would be a revelation to Sarita, an education in itself, she said. Lady Dorothea had curious limitations. She had never been jealous of any woman, nor petty in her relations with them. As she herself said, she had only one vice . . . of course, she was entirely blind to what it included. Up to the present it had not included jealousy. But now she insisted that Sally should buy her clothes in Paris, because she could not bear that Mr. Perry should use his incomparable skill for any other than herself! And in London there was no one but Mr. Perry.

Mr. Perry had no idea that Miss Mainwaring was leaving the stage and going abroad, chaperoned by Lady Dorothea Lytham. It was enough for him that Lady Dorothea was going, he knew she would do justice to his models. She gave him but little time, but he employed it well. Kiddie was going to pay. On some pretext or another Kiddie was taken more than once to Brook Street. More than once Lady Dorothea reminded them that "Lord Kidderminster was going to pay." They had no doubt of the fact.

Kiddie was quite indifferent to her extravagances. Sarita would accept nothing from him, not a bow, not a ribbon. She had returned him the diamond brooch he had given her long ago; it was the only piece of jewellery he had ever offered, and it was subsequent to Colonel Fellowes' gift. She still wore Colonel Fellowes' chain. Taking a present from a man old enough to be her father seemed to her very

different from accepting one from Kiddie, after that talk with Miss Rugeley.

She was very proud. She would go abroad with Lady Dorothea Lytham, since Lady Dorothea was good enough to ask her, but she would pay her own expenses. She had only one debt on her conscience, the one already contracted to the Brook Street establishment, and this was always worrying her. She would not have added to it, even if Lady Dorothea had willed it; neither did she mean to buy anything in Paris. But she drew her large salary a fortnight in advance, and she went away out of debt.

Kiddie hit on a good scheme; he asked her to let him have five pounds of her money to put on a horse. He forgot to tell her the name of the horse until the next day, when her five pounds had turned to fifty. She could hardly believe it, hardly be induced to accept the money, until he showed her the paper. Clarion had won, it had started at ten to one. She thought it very clever indeed of Kiddie to have picked out the winner. She could not be expected to know that he had only picked it out after the event.

At the theatre the secret of her departure was to be kept to the last. The end of the pantomime season would release a principal boy or girl, whom the fickle public would accept until Sally's return. The new engagement might not keep the theatre full, but that was Kidderminster's affair. It would at least keep it open, and that was everybody's. Tom and Edgar quite expected Miss Mainwaring's return. Lord Kidderminster would not want to keep her altogether off the boards. He would have other occupations, other obligations. There was no thought of marriage; if there was to have been a marriage, it would have been announced. All they were told was that Miss Sarita Mainwaring was going to "take a rest."

Colonel Fellowes was perhaps the most puzzled party in the whole quickly moving drama. Dorothea begged him neither to inquire nor interfere. Of course he would have interfered. Dorothea habitually used him for her purposes, but he always had her measure. As far as their personal relations were concerned, he had the mastery of the position, because he retained the mastery of himself. He cared for her exactly as much as she deserved, and for the same reason.

But he had no idea what purpose she had in her mind in taking Miss Mainwaring to Monte Carlo, and he was ordered not to inquire.

"If it be with any idea of reconciling the Fortives to Kiddie marrying her, it is too preposterous a scheme even for you to have conceived," he said, stumbling by accident on what she had promised Kiddie.

"I told you not to inquire. Do I ever do anything foolish?"

"Often."

"I know. But I mean desperately foolish, like other people?"

"Never. I'll do you full justice there; you never do anything like other people."

"Well, be sure then, I'm not doing it now. I like Kiddie, I don't see why he shouldn't have what he wants. And you ought to be very much obliged to me for taking you with us, you know you are yearning for the South."

"Well, yes, perhaps. But I'm not yearning for Paris, with Kiddie, you, and the chorus girl in a quartette party. It's altogether odd, and out of my line."

"Perhaps you'd like me to go alone?"

"I'm not at all sure I shan't leave you to do Paris by yourself. I've half a mind to go straight through and wait for you at Nice."

Dorothea laughed.

"Don't you worry about Paris," she finished oracularly. "I know what I'm about. Kiddie is going to get a surprise. . . ."

CHAPTER XIX

KIDDIE'S surprise came about in this way.

They met at Victoria Station about ten minutes before the train went. Sally's instinctive good taste, although, without Mr. Perry as guide, philosopher, and friend, it did not reach Lady Dorothea's smartness, taught her how to dress for this newest and strangest of her experiences. Her travelling coat was dark blue, with a gold-braided military collar, her small hat would defy the breeze in the Channel, and her veil would keep it secure. She had a dressing-bag; Miss Rugeley pressed this luxury upon her. It was rather a poor affair, but it held all she might need beyond the contents of her trunk, a cane one, light and convenient. Ursula had suggested coming to see her off; but Sally reminded her of a possible fog, and the difficulties of getting back to Bayswater. Ursula had spent the whole morning with Sally, arriving at eight, helping her to pack, bringing her own limited experience of foreign travel to bear on the other's ignorance. The sea-sickness was a foregone conclusion, and everything was arranged for it. There were two guaranteed cures, and a bottle of eau-de-Cologne, smelling salts, and a small flask of brandy. Sally was quite sure she was not going to be sick, but appreciated all the directions, and the fuss that was being made about her.

Sally was a little in awe of Lady Dorothea, but Kiddie met her at the entrance to the station. His man was there to look after the luggage, he told her.

"You are very late. I've been here since half-past ten."

"I couldn't get away. There was so much to do. Miss Rugeley has been with me all the morning, helping me to pack."

"Dolly is here, and the Colonel. I say, is that thing warm enough?"

"My coat? Oh, yes, and I've got a woollen jersey underneath."

Kiddie had his man, and Dolly her maid. There was nothing to be done but for the two ladies to take their seats, and be supplied with hot water tins, and books, periodicals, and newspapers. They had the compartment to themselves, reserved to Dover. It was very different from that third-class trip to Brighton with Elfrida; Sally's eyes sparkled with the pleasure of it. She was very silent, looking out of the window most of the way. Colonel Fellowes tried to talk to her, and Lady Dorothea was very kind. She told her all about Mr. Perry's clothes.

"He is coming out himself in a week or two. I believe he gets half his ideas abroad. He never misses Monte, nor the Paris races, nor Trouville. He goes everywhere that well-dressed people go, picking up a notion here, a notion there. He always claims them as his own, but one recognizes Doucet, Paquin, Beer, Worth."

Sally's loyalty loosed her tongue:

"He never uses a model as he buys it; and he makes lots of things himself, bodices, even whole dresses. I've seen him doing it on the stands."

"How fearfully interesting! Aren't you sorry you ever left the shop?" Dolly asked, a little maliciously perhaps.

"I don't know . . . he was often not there," she answered, a little doubtfully, conscious, although not resentful, of the note of contempt. Sometimes she had felt sorry that she had ever left Brook Street. It was true there was

much about the theatre that she did not like. And every day, as she understood them more clearly, she had liked some things less.

"But surely you like dancing better than being in a shop!" Colonel Fellowes interposed.

"I was very happy in Brook Street. I thought it very good of her ladyship, and him too," colouring, and including Kiddie in her grateful glance, "to help me to go there."

Dolly would have liked to draw her out on the subject of life on the musical comedy stage, its temptations, its sparkle, and allurements. She would not have been averse to hearing of the young ladies who had broughams, and motors, and learning who was supposed to pay for them. But Sally did not tell tales out of school. Besides, she knew but little, she had not grown into real intimacy with any of the girls at the Verandah. She had had the exceptional advantage of a dressing-room to herself, which, at first, entailed a certain amount of unpopularity.

Failing to draw her out, Lady Dorothea relapsed from her attentions and devoted herself to cigarettes, periodicals, and the talk of the two men. It was chiefly of racing. Kiddie said he should stay in Paris over Sunday and take them to Longchamps. How could he realize the meaning of Dolly's laugh? Sally went on looking out of the window.

They arrived at Dover punctually. Sally liked the harbour, and the smell of the sea that came refreshingly to her. She liked to see the porters with the luggage, and the big boat waiting for them.

It was going to be a rough passage, even in the harbour, the wind churned up the waves, and the foam marked their crests. The others were experienced travellers. They arranged their seats on the lee side, took advantage of the shelter of the cabin-tops, and did not contemplate being inconvenienced by the weather. Sally sat down with them,

but the screw had hardly made a dozen revolutions, they had barely left the harbour, before she turned to Kiddie, instinctively, for protection. She felt frightened and ill.

"Good heavens! She's going to be sea-sick. How disgusting! I thought it was only the maids who were sea-sick," Dorothea said to Colonel Fellowes.

Sally heard, but did not care. There was another roll of the vessel . . .

Kiddie found an unoccupied cabin for her, and fetched a stewardess.

"She is not exactly one of us, is she, Kiddie?" Dorothea said, a little cruelly, to him on his return. "I'm afraid it's going to be a failure."

The Colonel eyed her curiously.

"You are very unfeeling," was Kiddie's only reply. He was fearfully sorry for Sally, and concerned about her. For himself he rather liked the motion of the vessel, the darkness of the sky, the roar of elements that drowned the throb of the machinery.

"You didn't expect she would turn out an experienced yachtsman because she wore a blue coat?" said Fellowes.

"I loathe people who are ill," answered Dorothea. "I can't help it, it's one of my idiosyncrasies. I thought I liked her, but since I've seen her like that, I can't even think about her. Keep her out of my way, do, there's a good boy, Kiddie. She seems horrible to me. . . . I can't help it."

There was no arguing with Lady Dorothea in this mood. Kiddie did as he was told. Sally remained in the cabin until they were at Calais. Then he fetched her, and was struck with her pallor. It was very natural. Sally was not worse than a great many other passengers had been. But then Lord Kidderminster had no glance to spare for the others. Colonel Fellowes had taken Lady Dorothea to get lunch, but Sally could not yet face food; she looked in at

the restaurant, because Kiddie urged her, but the look and smell of the place were as yet too much for her. Kiddie walked with her to the train, and returned to get something to eat; he had his usual healthy appetite.

"Is she better now?" Dorothea said. "You mustn't mind, Kiddie, but I shall have to travel in another carriage. I know she'll be ill all the way, Marie is, generally. She'll have a frightful headache and moan, and make no end of a fuss. Freddie will come with me, you go with her, if you can stand it."

"I don't call it great heroism to look after a girl who has been upset by one of the worst passages we've ever experienced. I swear, I sometimes wonder if you are a woman at all," Kiddie said indignantly, with his mouth full, bolting his food in order to get back to Sally quickly.

"I'm not a sick nurse, if that's what you mean. You run away and bathe her head," she mocked. "Freddie will look after me. Ta-ta, until Paris. The Bristol, you know, not the Ritz," she called after him, as he rushed off. He got a small luncheon-basket packed, and secured some cold chicken, a bottle of claret, some grapes and oranges.

"You were not very kind to him," Colonel Fellowes said, a little curiously. "Since when has an attack of sea-sickness affected you to this extent of horror?"

"Now, don't you begin to scold me. Order me some coffee, and see after Marie, will you?"

Marie had had her instructions. She was a little difficult to find, but was run to earth at last. The platform was swept by wind and rain. On either side of it stood the high, grey trains. It was difficult to hear oneself speak. Colonel Fellowes' French was of the public school variety. He understood that both trains were right, both were going to Paris. When Dorothea joined him, having deliberately lingered over her coffee, waiting until porters were shout-

ing, engines whistling, and the last possible moment had arrived, he was still searching for Kiddie, looking up and down the platform, into both trains. But she caught him in time:

"On the left; why don't you get in?" she called out.

"I was just coming back to fetch you," he said. "I can't see where the others are. Marie said she was all right. She did not want any help."

Dorothea got in; her seat had been reserved. When she was there to help him, even Colonel Fellowes was able to find it.

After rapidly exchanging a few words with the pallid Marie, who was waiting with her cushion and elaborate dressing-bag, Lady Dorothea settled herself comfortably. "Now I'm going to have a nap," she said. "Don't wake me on any account until we get to Amiens."

The Colonel wandered up and down the corridor carriages before they started, and even after. One was a restaurant car, the others were mostly sleeping cars. He began to be vaguely uneasy. But, when they were really in motion, he too relapsed into sleepy silence, with his cigarette.

He got Dorothea a cup of tea at Amiens. He also made use of the short wait to make a more thorough search of the train. He had no idea of the trick that had been played until he came back to Dolly.

"They are not in the train at all. I've looked through every carriage!"

"I never supposed they were," she said. She handed him back her cup, through the window. "What filthy tea, isn't it? Don't look as if you had seen a ghost."

He was thunderstruck, he looked at her; her face was quite calm, although she had not liked the tea. He paid for the tea, and mounted the train again. He was really

speechless; the audacity of the trick, the way it had been carried out, and his own blindness, all struck him at once.

The train bumped and whistled its way out of Amiens station.

"Well, now, please, you had better make a clean breast of it," he said. "What does it all mean? What has become of Kiddie, where is Miss Mainwaring?"

She smiled into his eyes.

"I told you not to worry about Paris."

"What devil's trick have you been up to?"

"No devil's trick at all. Kiddie wanted to go to Paris. I didn't. I wanted to go to Monte Carlo, *voilà tout.* This is the *train de luxe,* it sweeps round Paris. We have not to change at all. I've got two sleeping berths."

"Did . . . did Kiddie know?" he gasped.

"He will be very much obliged to me. They will really be much more comfortable by themselves. You saw how impossible she was."

"You meant it all the time?"

"Of course. Don't you think it rather clever? Kiddie had got into a sort of high falutin', rarefied air; he'd fallen in love with the little guttersnipe. . . ."

"Well!" The Colonel drew a long breath. The sentence that rose to his mind was, "I've seen some bad women in my time, but without any doubt you take the cake." Yet what was the good of saying it? Dolly was pluming herself, smiling, she expected to be praised for her cleverness.

"You've played for this all the time?"

"All the time."

"That Kiddie and she should arrive in Paris together, at eight o'clock in the evening . . .?"

"With their rooms taken at the Bristol, for 'Monsieur

and Madame,'" she laughed. "Wasn't it a good scheme? Kiddie will be awfully grateful, you see if he isn't."

"You mean . . ."

"Don't be a big booby. She had been playing with him, putting him off on one pretext or another, scheming to be Lady Kidderminster. I have played guardian angel to the family; the Fortives ought to give me a pension. I'm sure I could do with one."

"But when Kiddie discovers the trick that has been played him . . ."

"Kiddie does not get to Paris until we have left it. That is a slow train he is in. Oh! I worked it all out."

The Colonel lit another cigarette; his hands were not quite steady. Dorothea had pretended to take this girl under her protection; she had swept her away from the safeguard of her work and place, she had thrown her into the arms of the man who was in love with her, with whom she was, perhaps, in love.

"Have you got a conscience at all?" he said aloud, "that is what I wonder. Are you not a little bit ashamed of what you are doing? Come, tell me that. After all, you have been a girl yourself."

"She will have a lovely time with Kiddie in Paris. And, when they are tired of each other, he can either buy her a house in St. John's Wood, or take a better flat in Victoria; the one she had was a miserable affair."

"But she was an honest little girl . . . virtuous, hard-working."

"She can be just as virtuous as Kiddie's mistress as she would have been as Kiddie's wife. She will have less temptation, too. You know, as well as I do, she would never have got on, she would never have been received anywhere if she had not made friends with the men, and done the things we all do. Look at Jenny Sandys; she

was on the stage, then she went to live with Lord Kent. They've got two children, and she is as virtuous as you want. She has lost her figure; I saw her in a brougham one day, horribly fat and respectable and *bourgeoise*. Kent provided handsomely for her. Well, now look at Connie Raynes, who married Summers. She has got her strawberry leaves, and lots of people receive her. No one ever got on so well. And you know why, the same as I do. It's because she is clever, and gets round the men, and stops at nothing. She treats Summers as if he were her lacquey. . . ."

She did not persuade Colonel Fellowes that her action had been justifiable, far less philanthropic. He contemplated getting out of the train when he arrived in Paris, waiting for Kiddie and Sarita at the Bristol. He even threw out the suggestion to Dorothea, who received it with ridicule, and made the ridicule realistic by describing a possible scene. Besides, she told him, and there was a certain amount of truth in it, he could not let her travel through to Monte Carlo, taking the night journey unattended.

His conscience was not nearly as callous as hers. He found himself restless all through that evening, and at Paris it was almost by force that Dorothea restrained him from leaving the train. It was a "devil's trick"; he had characterized it quite correctly. If he had not had, in his heart, so bad an opinion of women, holding their honour and honesty in such cheap estimation, he might still have resisted her. But why should he think Miss Sarita Mainwaring different from all her sex? And, if she had schemed to marry Kiddie, she deserved that her schemes should be frustrated. In which he reasoned weakly, but then he had always been weak in his conduct, only strong in his profession. His sense of honour was high in all save in his traffic with women.

So the train crawled its slow way from the Terminus to the Nord, and then started rattling, shaking, shrieking, as if it were driven to make up for wasted time. After a certain amount of quarrelling and recrimination, a thing the Colonel hated, he and Dorothea became reconciled, and ate their dinner together in the swaying restaurant car, sharing a bottle of Pommery, amicable in their truce.

And Lady Dorothea slept well through the night, notwithstanding the oscillations of the train, the shrieking engine, and many stoppages, to wake in the sunshine at Marseilles without even a pang of regret, remorse, or misgiving.

CHAPTER XX

LORD KIDDERMINSTER and Miss Sarita Mainwaring, of the Verandah Theatre, arrived in Paris about ten minutes past eight. Very soon after leaving Calais, Sarita found her health and spirits reviving; the luncheon-basket, which Kiddie's care had provided, completed the cure. And then, like the grateful child she was, she began to remember how kind Kiddie had been, and how thoughtful of her comfort. She began to repay him with thanks, by showing interest in her surroundings, and a considerable accession of liveliness. She remembered Lady Dorothea's repugnance and disgust at her illness, and felt secretly sympathetic, and ashamed of herself. But Kiddie had not hated her, and was in no way different to her.

At Amiens, Kiddie, too, searched the train. He found Barlow, his man, who, either stupid or misinformed, explained the situation:

"The train went in two parts, milord. Her ladyship got into the other part, just as it were moving, at the last moment. We got your lordship's luggage and Miss Mainwaring's with us all right."

Kiddie was quite satisfied. He did not know the Paris train went in two parts, although now he remembered that when he showed his tickets he had Sarita's, and the Colonel had Dolly's; the guard had gesticulated and vociferated. Kiddie was no linguist; he had given the man half a sovereign, and leapt up the high step of the motionless, half-empty train, whither Sarita had preceded him.

Barlow's explanation at Amiens quite satisfied Kiddie.

He would much rather be alone with Sarita until they got to Paris, for he resented Dorothea's unkindness. Tender as he had always been over Sarita, her weakness, helplessness, illness, her clinging to him, and depending on him, had accentuated his tenderness a thousandfold. Kiddie had never taken care of anybody. But now he arranged his bag as a footstool for Sally, got out eau-de-Cologne for the headache which Dorothea had predicted, but about which Sarita made no fuss, procured tea for her, made her rest her head against his shoulder, and persuaded himself that he could look forward to having her always to take care of. He knew his feelings were different from anything he had ever felt before. He believed he could make his mother understand, whilst he was sure his father would not condemn him to misery. He would never give up Sarita — never.

To Sarita, nevertheless, it proved a long journey. It was all so new, and the incidents of her crossing had left her strained and tired. She had tried not to show it, and succeeded to a certain extent, but she was very glad when Kiddie told her the lamps she saw at long distances were the lights of Paris, when these grew closer, and more numerous, and at last the train stopped.

It was a long drive to the Bristol Hotel. Lord Kidderminster was well known there. The stout hall-porter said, in English, "Good evening, milord."

"Has Lady Dorothea arrived?" Kiddie asked, jumping out, helping Sarita, never doubting the answer, nor waiting for it. The other train had passed them, they were half an hour late.

All Frenchmen in the lower ranks of life who speak English speak with little expectation of being spoken to, they understand but little. Kiddie repeated his inquiry at the desk.

"Her ladyship has not yet arrived?"

The telegram, reserving the rooms, had said —

"Monsieur et Madame arrivent ce soir."

It was signed Kidderminster, and they had kept him the suite on the first floor, they did not understand that the party was a larger one. Milord knew the rooms? No? They would show them to him. But perhaps it was not for milord that the rooms were reserved?

Something dawned on Kiddie, only a glimmer, but it made him *distrait;* it made his heart beat, and the little pulses in his head throb.

He rejoined Sarita.

"Dolly and Fellowes haven't turned up yet," he said. "Come on . . . you will be glad to get to your rooms."

They followed the clerk upstairs to the suite on the *entresol:* the big sitting-room, the double-bedded room beyond it, the dressing- and bathroom.

"They'll do, won't they?" he asked her. He could not say more before the clerk. "They are all right?"

"Oh, they are grand," said Sally, relapsing into a velvet chair. "I'm so tired. I'm glad we've got here first." For Sally had heard Barlow's story, too. "I'll be all right when I've washed my face and done my hair. I feel as if it's months since we started. Was it really only this morning?"

The clerk wanted to know if they would dine upstairs, if he should send the waiter. As yet Kiddie only suspected. He hesitated, but Sarita must want her dinner.

"We'll have something up here," he said quickly, and gave the necessary order.

He had to go with Sarita into the bedroom, and show her where to ring for the chambermaid, and tell her how to ask for hot water.

"But they all speak English here," he said, "that's why

I come. You'll get your trunk in no time. I must say that for Barlow, he's very quick."

Lord Kidderminster lingered until the hot water came. It gave him an odd sense of familiarity, sitting there with Sarita in her bedroom. She was glad to have him wait with her. She was feeling lonely and strange; yet not uneasy at Lady Dorothea's non-appearance, but glad rather, for she was too tired to enjoy the radiance of that most radiant of ladies.

The hot water came, and still Kiddie lingered. The trunk arrived, then he waited to see it uncorded. After which Sarita turned him out, and he went to make his own toilette.

He made a few inquiries, first of Barlow, then of the clerk in the further office. But the evening post had come in, and made further inquiries unnecessary.

"DEAR KIDDIE,

"It's just possible that I shall change my mind *en route*, and go straight to Monte; so I'm sending this line to meet you in Paris. You can have a very good time in Paris, much better than she, or either of you, could have in Monte Carlo — you know that as well as I do. Now, be a good boy, enjoy yourself thoroughly, and I'll hear what a good coz I've been to you in three months' time. Don't take her off the stage, that would be really a mistake. I'll explain matters at the Villa, trust me for that, I'll be ambiguous, and I'll announce you for Easter. You'll be through the first rhapsodies by then, and able to meet your father and mother with a properly brazen face. You'll be glad by then you didn't make a fool of yourself.

"Ta-ta, here's luck.

"DOLLY."

Kiddie went very slowly back to the salon. Sarita was there already, much improved by her ablutions. She looked very pretty in a blue blouse and a short white skirt, both home-made. She looked very young too, and a little pale. Kiddie's heart leapt toward her.

The *tête-à-tête* dinner was very agreeable. They had had many meals together, but none quite like this. Kiddie was very quiet, and his appetite failed him, although he got through a bottle of champagne. Sarita ate like a young sparrow-hawk; she said she was ravenous, and proved it. She would have preferred that the two waiters had not stayed in the room, for she thought their presence was making Kiddie silent:

"Are you going out after dinner?" she asked him. "Or shall we wait here until they come? Won't they be hungry — my!"

"We'll go out for an hour if you like, just on the Boulevards; it's a fine night."

"And you'll leave them word where we are."

He took her out, just for an hour, up the Place de la Concorde, then along the Rue de Rivoli, turning up the Rue de Richelieu, he did not want to meet any one he knew. Sally chattered, and he had to respond. He had not made up his mind to any plan of action. Sally felt the influence of the lighter air and gayer people. Many turned round to look at her, standing still upon the pavement and staring, in the way Frenchmen have. This amused her, and once she turned round and smiled at an *élégant* outside one of the cafés.

Back at the hotel, running lightly up to the salon, Sarita had still no premonition of anything being wrong.

"Why, you don't mean to say they haven't come yet?" she exclaimed. She had taken off her hat and coat and come back to the room to find Kiddie. Kiddie was seated

at the writing-table; he had sat down with the intention of telling Dorothea what he thought of her. But his hands were trembling, and he could not write. He had to enlighten Sarita; but he did not know how to do it. It was nearly eleven.

"No," he said. "No, they haven't come yet," his voice faltering. Then he got up from the writing-table, and Sarita saw his face, it was very pale. Hers went pale too.

"They haven't come!" she repeated, mechanically.

"Sarita," he came over to her. He would have taken her in his arms, but she shrank back, her eyes wide, rather frightened:

"We've got to face it. Dorothea and Fellowes got into the wrong train. . . ."

"On purpose?"

"What's the good of asking?"

She sat down by the table in the middle of the room. She hid her face from him, resting it in her hands. He came over to her, and put his arms about her, trying gently to move her hands from her face, that he might look at her.

"You know I did not mean this?" he said.

She made no answer.

"You know how I care for you." He put his face against hers. "I'll take care of you, and love you all your life, Sarita, trust me; you shall never be sorry, I swear it. Love me, trust me."

She did not repel him, she was listening, held by the sound of his voice, and the sense of his face near hers. She knew that she loved him. And he pleaded to her, now boyishly, offering her gentleness and jewellery in a breath; now like a man, taking away her breath, carrying her will on the flood-tide of his rising passion.

Presently she put her arms round his neck:

"Must we do it, Kiddie, must we?" she said simply, breathlessly.

They held each other, their hearts beating. Kiddie's eyes grew wet like hers. She was pleading with him now:

"I do love you. I didn't mean to, I didn't mean ever to love anybody, only to work and keep myself honest, and be happy in myself. I am not happy now, I never shall be again. I'd rather be dead than . . . than do what you want. But I will do it, if you say I must." Her breath came quickly. "It was what Lady Dorothea wanted me to do from the first. I see it now. She thinks it's all I'm fit for. But it isn't true. . . ."

Kiddie was holding her very tightly to him; her strained eyes and his dim ones saw each other strangely.

"Oh, Kiddie! let me be good, let me keep good!" she burst out crying, entreating him.

Kiddie had grown strangely gentle. He drew her to the sofa, made her lie down, and knelt by her.

"Don't cry, don't cry. I can't bear to see you cry."

"I shall never do anything but cry."

"You would give yourself to me . . . feeling this?"

That was what moved him, and shook the very strength of his desire. It was all true. She had only wanted to work, and be happy; he would be taking work from her, that was the bribe he offered her, he would make her ashamed. All the glamour went out of the prospect; this was the second time she had chilled all the fire of his passion for her, flooding it in tenderness. He loved her, and there was not that in him to hurt the thing he loved. There was no evil in him, except that which his adult education had laid on him. It was a thin veneer; and it all peeled off at the touch of love.

"I will take care of you."

He vowed it to himself as well as to her.

"Tell me one thing, tell me only that, leave off crying, don't be frightened. Sarita, we must talk, don't turn your face away from me. I only want to know one thing, but I must know it. Do you love me as . . . as I love you?"

She sat up on the sofa, looked into his eyes, faltered, reddened, paled, then hid her own again on his breast. In that moment she knew her own desire, felt something of Kiddie's. *She wanted to yield to him;* she had a loving woman's sudden weakness of surrender:

"Yes, yes, I do, I do love you." They clung to each other.

"Will you love me — love me, for ever?" His voice was difficult.

"I don't know. . . . I've never felt like this."

She was burning, her hands and her cheeks and her lips all one flush. But his face against hers cooled her, and the feel of his shoulder comforted. He kissed her too, so tenderly, so differently; she could not meet his eyes.

Then he stood up; how tall and strong he was! His face looked strong too, with the square chin, and in the grey eyes there was a new determination. No one was like Kiddie. How could she deny him? Let the misery come to her, the misery of to-morrow's self-contempt. She could drown herself to-morrow; but to-night, to-night, Kiddie might do what he liked. Thought took her no further, she fell trembling before him, hiding her desperate face in the sofa cushion.

"What is the address of that lady who helped you in your packing? You've spoken of her to me often. Miss Rugeley — what is Miss Rugeley's address?"

"Miss — Miss Rugeley," Sally repeated. She wanted to shriek to him: — "Oh, don't tell her, don't tell her. Have your way with me. Who am I to deny you? But she

must not know. I'll drown myself to-morrow. Only don't tell her; don't ever let her know."

"Yes! It's too late to-night. But I'm going round to Meurice's; I can wire from there. She is really a good friend of yours, isn't she? She'd come to you if you sent for her."

Did he know she was going to drown herself to-morrow? How cruel! She pictured herself cold in death, and Ursula coming to her.

"Yes," she said, still in that strained voice. Why did he not come back to her and take her in his arms? It was cruel of him to think of to-morrow, she wanted the warmth of his arms around her, and his face close to hers. All her courage was oozing away.

Then his startling words fell:

"We will be married as soon as ever I can make the necessary arrangements. At the Consulate here, or in London. You'll want some one with you, anyway, on the way back, or here. Give me her address."

Sarita gasped it out. She was unnerved, such a thing had never entered her head. Marry Kiddie, be with him always, love him as much as she liked! Her brain reeled. It was not a very strong brain at its best, not quite an adult one. Marry Kiddie! She missed his next few sentences.

Yes, that was his decision, quite irrevocable now. He would carry it through whatever the consequences. Neither father nor mother must count. As for his position, his prospects, they did not count either. For every man there was one woman in the world, and he had found his. "Greater love than this;" he forgot the quotation, but he knew what Sarita would have done for him.

He would not trust himself any longer with her; besides, his new-born unselfishness for her told him she must be tired, deadly tired.

"Good night," he said. A moment again they clung to each other.

"Oh, Kiddie."

"Say 'Good night, my Gilbert, God bless you.'"

"God bless you."

"Gilbert."

"God bless you, my Gilbert."

CHAPTER XXI

A CERTAIN amount of haste had to be observed, and a measure of secrecy secured. Kiddie was not unaware of either necessity, and, if he had been, Ursula Rugeley's attitude, when she arrived the next evening, very bewildered and travel-worn, but in time for dinner, would have assured him of it.

Miss Rugeley had not hesitated to come, although she could not imagine what had occurred, unless, perhaps, a railway or boat accident. She could not understand Sally meeting her at the station, looking so well and happy, nor the presence of Lord Kidderminster, and the absence of Lady Dorothea.

The explanations were delayed until after dinner. Then the depth and intensity of Ursula's indignation knew no bounds. It had been a trap; she put her arms closer round the girl, a trap into which one might so well have fallen! But Ursula believed in the Divine Power, it was the Divine Power that had shielded Sarita from harm.

When her indignation was a little spent, she enjoyed the atmosphere of love these two young people brought about her; Kiddie's protecting ways, Sally's newly acquired coquettishness. It seemed almost a different Sally, without her independence or aloofness; she was transfigured, and glowing with happiness. Kiddie, although love sat in his eyes, softened every speech, thrilled in the deep notes of his voice, was much the graver of the two. He felt it was a serious step he was taking. He would have given

anything for his mother's countenance. But he was in no humour for battle. They must be married first; Sarita must be irrevocably bound to him before he asked permission to take her. Dorothea had played him one trick; no one should be in a position a second time to rob him of his happiness. Dolly might have spoken of Sarita to his mother, spoken falsely. His mother should see her only when she had become his wife.

Ursula urged in vain. Ursula wanted him to leave her with Sarita in Paris, then go on to Monte Carlo, and obtain his parents' consent. She did not see the difference of position quite in the way Lord Kidderminster saw it, in the way the Marquess of Fortive would regard it. She had a very high opinion of Sally's character, an old maid's extraordinary romantic view of love, and a hazy, floating quotation in her mind about "kind hearts being more than coronets." But Kiddie knew his people too well to consult them, for all that he was an idolized and only son.

Ursula had arrived on Sunday. By eleven o'clock on Monday morning Kiddie was at the English Consulate. Everybody was away but a third secretary, and one or two bored attachés, to all of whom Lord Kidderminster was unknown. They accepted him under the name he gave, but they were unanimous in assuring him that a three weeks' residence in the capital was necessary before a marriage could take place. It was a matter not open to argument, not remediable by bribery, it was the inevitable law of embassies, not only in Paris, but in every civilized country where international courtesies prevail. The young idlers at the big house in the Faubourg St. Honoré were very sorry for Kiddie. He was quite unable to conceal his feelings. Three weeks was a devilish long time to wait; they sympathized with his obvious chagrin, his furious disappointment. But there was really no way out of it.

Every difficulty increased Kiddie's restlessness, his desperate determination to have Sarita for wife, his fears of interruption, peremptory or pleading, from Monte Carlo. The news at the embassy was check, but not checkmate. He was back at the Bristol by noon. Sarita and Miss Rugeley, conquering all difficulties of inexperience and language, had been out shopping; the results of their struggle at the *Bon Marché* were strewn all over the room; a white lace blouse, a white cloth skirt, a white hat, untrimmed, ribbons and flowers in a paper parcel. Already the busy fingers were making loops, and tying bows.

"It's orange flowers you've got there," he said. He fingered the paper parcel. Ursula's presence made their greeting little different from what it had been in the Victoria Street days. It was only under circumstances of exceptional stress that either Kiddie or Sarita became demonstrative. The colour came and went in her happy face, when he entered, came and went in his paler one as he avoided the subject of which his mind was so full.

"I told her she must be married in white," Ursula interrupted; she, too, was full of importance and business. "The blouse fits perfectly, it's Irish lace, real, a duchess might wear it. We shall have to shorten the skirt, I can do that whilst Sally trims her hat. You don't know how clever she is at trimming hats."

"She's clever at everything."

"Well, I can't do my work if you don't move off," Sally answered quickly.

He was standing by her, watching her deft fingers; and now his arm had gone about her shoulders. She was a little shy with him, her eyes not meeting his very easily, and her colour fluctuating. But she tried the hat on, made him give an opinion as to the position of the trimming, and was perhaps a trifle gayer, more talkative than usual, not

perfectly at ease. The simplicity of the scene, the domesticity of it, appealed to him; always she gave him that odd little thrill, half pain, half pleasure.

It was Ursula who had urged these purchases, who had faced Kiddie's impatience last night, and known there would be no delay in the marriage. She had reckoned for three days' grace, she had meant to insist upon them. And it was Ursula who realized that Kiddie must have met with some check, that he was not as happy as last evening, that his eyes were strained, and he had something to tell them. Sally tried on her hat, and talked of their morning's experiences, the shopwalker's funny English, the multiplicity of things they had seen.

"Are you coming out to lunch?" Kiddie asked presently.

"Oh! let's have something here, I can't leave my hat."

"But it is dull for you, isn't it? You'd like to see something of Paris?" Gilbert asked Miss Rugeley. Then he said hurriedly:

"We shall be here such a short time. You see . . ."

It was really difficult to tell them what he had to say. He had thought it all out, but, to use his own phraseology, he knew it was "pretty stiff," having brought Miss Rugeley out here, to make her go back to-night. Yet that was what he had decided. In England there need be no delay, they could get a special license, they could be married a few hours after landing on English soil. If it came to that, they need not go further than Dover!

When at length he got it all out, and explained the Paris Embassy difficulty, and the English "special license" facility, he carried all before him by his vehemence. Ursula said several times that she "did wish" he would communicate with his parents. But Monte Carlo was very vague and distant to her, and, when Gilbert answered shortly that it was quite impossible, the particular im-

possibility evaded her. She thought he might send a "Marconigram," but hardly liked to suggest it on account of the possible expense. In fact, she was hustled and hurried out of all her calm good sense. Kiddie actually succeeded in getting them to the *Gare du Nord* in time for the evening train and night boat. They were bewildered and breathless, but everything had been packed up, the precious wedding hat was trimmed, and in its own cardboard box, and Kiddie had even managed to take them to Rumpelmayer's to tea, and had shown Ursula the outside of the Louvre, the Opera House, and the Madeleine, in a hurried taximetric hour.

They were too tired to be sea-sick; or, at least, that is how they explained to each other their enjoyment of a quiet rest in their double cabin, on a night that was windless, on a sea that was like glass.

London, the next morning, was grey and strange to their sight. Sally felt that she had been away for an incredible time. But the servants at that trim villa of Ursula's had no illusions, and were at first resentful of their mistress' rapid return, and the visitor she brought with her. Kiddie had put the ladies in a cab, and let them go to Chepstow Villas by themselves. He had his work to do. Hurry was the note of it, hurry, hurry, hurry. Nothing must stop the marriage. He saw his Sarita with Miss Rugeley, sheltered and seemly, and hourly his love grew.

She had offered to yield . . . that had been the supreme moment. He had known her purity, then she showed him her courage. He dared not think it was her love she had shown him, somehow that troubled him. She must be his wife, then he could care for her always, showing her he had understood. Kiddie was all aflame with his chivalry and his tenderness, and his appreciation of what Sarita would have done for him. She clung now to Ursula, but the clinging

showed no weakness, only a certain maidenliness, shyness. He thrilled at this and at herself, at the consciousness of her manner toward him, at the knowledge of how soon they would be man and wife.

Sally quickly recovered from the fatigues of the hurried double journey. She slept them off whilst Kiddie was securing his license. The room at the villa was happily familiar to her, the heavy walnut furniture, the hanging bookcases, Brussels carpet and autotypes, the mackintosh cloth behind the washing stand, all the clean, prim decorousness of Ursula's home.

"I knew I was goin' to be happy from the first moment I set eyes on it, near two years ago. Oh! my, what a lot has happened since then" was the thought that rose-lit her sleepiness as her head touched the pillow.

And when she awoke, quite fresh and gay, ready for her bath, and the meal Ursula's forethought had provided, she was still in retrospective humour. There was a note Kiddie had sent up by cab.

"Fixed everything for to-morrow morning twelve o'clock, All Saints Church."

This was the gist of it. He was not good at expressing his feelings on paper, and he had hardly slept since Saturday. He said he was "going to have a 'Turker' and turn in early. But after to-morrow . . ."

Even then the note did not become eloquent, but Sally was quite happy when she had spelled it out.

She was going to be married to-morrow; her dress was all ready, and her hat trimmed. Ursula Rugeley was in bed, and Kiddie was not coming. She had gloves and other little things to buy, and she felt too restless to stay in the house alone. She ran upstairs again when she had read her letter, and donned hat and coat. She paused in the hall to call down to Eliza to tell Miss Rugeley when she

woke, that she would be back in a couple of hours. Then she realized, with a sigh of relief, how glad she was to be back in London, to be able to hail the familiar omnibus in her own vernacular, to be once more free and self-confident.

Of course, she must go West for her gloves and veil. She sat on the top of the omnibus, inhaled joyfully the London air, and, forgetting altogether that she was going to be Lady Kidderminster, remembered only that she was awfully happy, and would be with Gilbert always after to-morrow, and — Mary and Alf would be so glad to know about it. And — yes, that came to her quite suddenly, in the midst of the block at the Marble Arch, Alf and Mary must come to her wedding.

She bought all that she wanted in Regent Street. It was really only a step from there to Messrs. Hall & Palmer's. That step Sally took.

The forewoman had not seen her since her accident. It was an open secret at the factory that Sally Snape and Miss Sarita Mainwaring were one. The forewoman was rather inclined to be impressed by Sally, but the girl was not at all in that humour. She had come to ask a favour, and the influence of the factory days descending upon her as soon as she entered the factory, she asked it almost humbly. She was going to be married to-morrow; might Mary Baines have a holiday? Might she see her? Sally knew that if she secured Mary, there would be no difficulty about Alf. She wanted her friends with her. She believed she knew where she could find Johnny Doone, she would try to get Johnny after she had secured Mary and Alf.

Miss Frazer hoped it was a nice young man she was marrying, and one in a good position? Miss Frazer was full of curiosity, but Sally had no time to gratify it. As soon as she had received permission, she was in amongst

the great seething cauldrons of jam, the sound of the boiling was in her ears, the sweet, sickly smell of the fruit in her nostrils. She was surrounded by the girls in their white pinafores. She had gone on the stage, now she had come to see them; they gathered about and chattered to her, and she to them, until Mary came. Mary had been promoted to the pickle room; the smell she carried of gherkin and onion was sharp against the sweet atmosphere. Vinegar, too, Sally detected, as she and Mary kissed each other. Then eager question and surprising answer uplifted them above their surroundings.

Mary, too, was going to be married, but not until next month; it had been put off because Mrs. Stevens had been ill. But Sally, Sally was going to be married to-morrow! Who was the bridegroom? Mary knew it wasn't Charlie Peastone, Charlie had taken up with a barmaid from the "Blue Posts," a red-headed thing; Mary couldn't abide her. It wasn't, it couldn't be, was it, Johnny Doone? Not that drunken Luke Cullen, surely not? But then, to be sure, he'd been sober enough lately. The firm had taken him back; he knew it was his last chance. Was it Luke Cullen? Mary was full of curiosity.

Somehow, the interest and curiosity, the questioning and cross-questioning, struck cold on Sally's mood. Since she had come to invite her to the wedding, it was natural that Mary would like to be told the name of the bridegroom. But, all at once, Sarita found it difficult to speak Gilbert's name, suddenly she saw her marriage as they would see it, she saw their incredulity and exclamation. She was once more Sally Snape, the factory girl, and she was going to marry Lord Kidderminster! She had progressed so far; now, looking back, it seemed such a little way to her old self.

"Never mind his name," she said confusedly, "you don't

know him. You just come to-morrow; then you'll see for yourself. I want you at my wedding."

"And you'll come to mine?"

Sally promised faithfully. She evaded question as far as possible. She said presently, on pressure, that his name was Gilbert, and she admitted he was well-to-do, and very good-looking. She became momentarily more embarrassed, but this tongue-tied, unready Sally was the one they knew.

She was glad to get out of the place, but this was not accomplished before she had met Luke Cullen, who looked very grimy, more unsavoury, more impossible, than before. She had not the heart to avoid him, for he had meant well by her. And she held out her hand to him. But Mary explained the situation, quickly, triumphantly, and Luke slunk off with a muttered word, incoherent.

In Wardour Street again, and alone — for Mary had had to get back to work — Sally felt her cheeks were burning. She wished she had not come, she wished Gilbert were not Lord Kidderminster, and so far above her. She had forgotten the difference between their stations, or put the fact from her, and her spirits fell to zero, she grew cold, and felt at once how tired she was, and how long the day had been!

"But I can't leave Johnny out. Johnny and me have been friends too long. I can't leave him out at my wedding." Sally must always be loyal, she sent her telegram to Johnny.

It was on Saturday that Lady Dorothea had carried out her brilliant scheme for securing, at once, Gilbert's happiness, and the gratitude of his parents. It was the following Wednesday when a larger party than Gilbert had anticipated, but smaller than the heir to the Marquis of Fortive might have expected, assembled at All Saints Church to witness the marriage of Sally Snape.

For Johnny, putting his feelings in the background, came in response to that telegram to see that his lordship did the right thing by her, and he brought with him a small detachment of his friends, in picturesque scarlet jerseys and banded caps. Mary was there, and Alf with her, the forewoman, full of curiosity, and Luke Cullen full of whisky. A selection of girls from the factory, who had stood at the same cauldron, and picked fruit from the same basin as Sally, came to see her "turned off." There were none of the young ladies from the theatre, however, the news had not penetrated there. Sally had not counted them among her friends. She had never been one with her entourage behind the footlights; neither what was fine nor what was coarse in her had been akin to their fineness or coarseness. She had been an alien amongst them.

Johnny Doone was the only one of the guests who knew the bridegroom. Neither Alf nor Mary could believe him when he gave them the name, as they waited for the coming of Sally in the front pew of the church. Exclamation, surprise, incredulity, filled the air.

"Lord Kidderminster! Well, I never. Sally a lady! Oh, lor!"

"He couldn't ha' got a better wife if he searched the world over," said Johnny Doone loyally; his face was very pale, and he felt his limbs were unsteady. It was a long time since he had had hopes of winning Sally Snape for himself; perhaps he had never been really hopeful. But they were friends, and Sally liked him more than most. He saw her look round the church when she came in with Miss Rugeley, and she smiled when she saw him, he knew it was at him she smiled; his loyalty was all aflame for her.

"Well, we shan't see much of her after this, I'm thinking.

She promised to come to my wedding, but she'll have forgot that," Mary answered.

"Sally won't forget," said Johnny.

"Hush!"

She came in, her simple white dress crowned by the home-made hat. Ursula, in black silk, played the mother's part well. Sally's face was very pale under her white hat, the red hair was the only note of colour about her. No one could see her eyes, until Johnny Doone saw them, when she sent that tremulous smile across to him. Quite suddenly, the day before, a sense of her unworthiness of Gilbert had come to her, and still a desperate humility was hers. Johnny would understand, he would remember those early days; she was thinking that when she smiled deprecatingly at him, she wanted his sympathy, she did not want him to think she had grown proud, or forgotten that day when she had been hungry on the doorstep at Angel Gardens.

She had not slept last night; it was the first sleepless night in all her young life. Pictures had come to her, from the Limehouse Street days, from the factory days. The great difference and distance between herself and her lover yawned black and abysmal before her tired eyes. But in the morning Kiddie came, bringing her flowers, and lover's reassurances, and now she was here smiling.

"*She's* not the one to forget old friends," Johnny exclaimed, under his breath, as she stood before the altar. And Johnny was right.

Kiddie, suddenly remembering the necessity of a best man, had telegraphed for Edgar; and it was the exuberant young Jew who stood beside him as he and Sally knelt together.

They knelt at the altar, those two, and the old clergyman made them man and wife. Sally knew little of prayer, but she put up a petition, a child's petition, not less fervent because almost wordless, that she might prove worthy of

Kiddie, and make him happy. She knew she would be a good wife to him, and work for him, if need be. She remained on her knees after the short service was over, still praying that she might grow worthy of him. She knew she loved him. And Johnny, oblivious in that moment of everything but her, prayed, too, in that vociferous, insistent, familiar way he had been taught, that God would give her happiness. Johnny's eyes and Sally's eyes were wet when they met again.

Gilbert, having forgotten his father and mother, and all he owed them, having thrust out of his mind, duty, memory, and misgiving, was in no humour for the religious part of the ceremony. He jumped up as soon as it was possible, hurrying down the aisle in most exuberant mood, ready to receive Tom Peters' congratulations, to be interviewed by a representative of the Press Association, to shake hands with everybody and anybody, to issue broadcast invitations. Edgar had wasted no time, it was to Edgar Levi he owed Tom's dilatory appearance, and the advertisement the occasion demanded.

"You must all come on to the Ritz, and have breakfast. You'll come, Peters. Go on, Levi, there's a good fellow, and order for . . . how many shall I say, Sarita?"

Sally, with a hand in Johnny's, and one in Mary's, with soft eyes wet, grateful to all her friends of the factory, feeling their sympathy acutely, answered quickly:

"Oh, all of them, everybody!"

"Let 'em all come," quoted Edgar.

There is no doubt the success of the function was due to him. He insisted on the presence of the Press representatives, he told Johnny he was to bring his pals along, and the four red jerseys certainly added to the picturesqueness of the party. The factory contingent was hurried into cabs, no expostulations, nor hanging back, being permitted.

Everybody must come. And it was Edgar's sense of the fitness of things that took them all to Romano's Restaurant instead of to the Ritz Hotel. Edgar and Tom escorted Miss Rugeley, a strange trio. Sally and Gilbert went off, gaily enough, in the motor, to the admiration of the crowd of small guttersnipes and street idlers who had collected.

"Isn't it jolly that they are all coming along with us? It is awfully good of you to ask them," was Sally's first speech to her new husband. "There's only one thing I've got left to wish for!"

"What's that? You oughtn't to have even one, I don't mean you ever to have anything left to wish for." But he was too happy to be sentimental. Edgar had insisted on bracing him with a pint of champagne before they had started for the church.

"I should have loved to have had Miss Baines and Mr. Perry too," she said, "they were so awfully good to me."

"Who is Miss Baines? Is Perry that bounder at Vi Farquharson's?"

"Bounder?" she answered wonderingly.

"Rather! Didn't you know he was a bounder? What a lot you've got to learn, darling!" He laughed joyously, as he put his arm around her, and made her put her head against his shoulder. He was filled with the thrill of possession, his growing excitement hiding all he should have remembered. It even carried him through his strange wedding feast.

CHAPTER XXII

THE first news Lord Fortive had of the marriage of his only son stared at him from the front page of the Continental edition of the "Daily Mail." At the same moment, Hildegarde's exclamation proved it to be in the "New York Herald" also. Father and daughter met each other's horrified eyes:

"A vulgar canard!"

"It can't be true!" broke from both of them simultaneously.

Tom and Edgar had done their picturesque best for Sally.

Lord Fortive read, after a complete, and only passably incorrect, description of his own rank, estate, and career, that Miss Sarita Mainwaring, who for a short time had lent the charm of her presence to the Verandah Theatre, was a daughter of Mr. James Snape-Mainwaring, for long well and honourably known as closely connected with our shipping industry.

"But how did you know that?" Tom had asked Edgar in surprise, as he read the proof.

"He was a dock labourer; you can't be more closely connected with our shipping industry than that, can you?" Edgar retorted, unabashed.

Even this casuistry failed to soften the blow at the Villa Bella Vista. Kiddie had written, but Kiddie's letter got there some hours later than the papers. It seemed impossible to doubt, and yet Lady Fortive doubted when her husband brought up the news.

"I would far rather have read that he had been killed in a railway accident," said Lord Fortive bitterly. "It is not only the marriage, the folly and wickedness of it, but the secrecy, and the ingratitude!"

"Don't condemn him unheard — don't! Let us wait. My boy could not have done this without a line, a word to me — wait. . . ."

"You've spoilt him, from first to last you've spoilt him. . . ."

Gilbert's trembling mother admitted it. One must blame some one when in trouble; and this was trouble, serious trouble, for them all. She had spoiled Gilbert, perhaps, but she had loved him, loved him well.

Dorothea and Colonel Fellowes arrived at the Villa Bella Vista very soon after the papers, although not in advance of the English representative of the Press Association. He had to extract his news from the servants. And the butler was a temporary engagement, not the family retainer from Buckminster. This man had no discretion, and little information, so five million of English people, interested in aristocratic news, read the next day that the first intimation Lord Fortive had received of his son's marriage was the announcement in the newspaper. And each newspaper claimed to have been this early medium. The interested public read that his lordship had said he would rather his son had been dead than that he should have contracted such a marriage, and he hoped never to see his son again. They learnt that there was no entail on the property, and Lord Fortive would disinherit the heir to his title.

Each paper dealt with the brief information from the Press Association in its own way, according to its traditions. The editor of the "Comet," for instance, had a difference of opinion with his American advertisement agent on the

subject of Tom Peters' full-page advertisement, giving a list of the ladies who had married into the peerage from the Musical Comedy stage. But the business manager, backing up his colleague, recognized the new tradition, and even insisted upon the leader, eulogistic of Tom Peters' productions, which was part of the agreed terms. The American advertisement agent made the Fortive-Mainwaring marriage the nucleus of a new scheme, by which every one who subscribed to the "Comet" for one year had a seat allotted monthly at one of the musical comedies, and a chance in a big matrimonial lottery. For, as Mr. Timson ably set forth in the circulars making the announcement, the matrimonial chance was just as good for those in the stalls as those behind the footlights. *To Be Seen* was the thing. To *Subscribe for a Year's Issue of the "Comet"* insured being seen.

The other papers maintained their several traditions.

Dolly rushed into the Bella Vista to blame, to condole, to do anything but confess her share in the proceedings. She had been much startled by the news. Colonel Fellowes had not said, "I told you so," or, as he probably thought, "It serves you right for interfering." But he did elevate his eyebrows when she read the startling news to him, and that was enough to make her stamp her foot at him and lose her temper.

At the Bella Vista she had only Hildegarde to encounter. Lord Fortive had withdrawn to his study, and Lady Fortive would hear nothing, see nobody, until she was in communication with her son. Her confidence in him was sadly shaken, but it was not destroyed. She could not bear to hear his father say he wished the boy were dead, although she knew the speech was made meaninglessly, in the first shock of the bad news. She could not bear even Hildegarde's exclamation and curiosity. Her heart ached, and

her dry eyes ached, her pain seemed a little greater than she could bear; but she knew she must be quiescent until her boy's letter came, telling her how it had been with him, why he had so cruelly excommunicated her, cutting her off from his love and confidence. She knew she had not deserved this from him.

Lord Fortive sent for Colonel Fellowes, later in the day, and questioned him. His rage had all gone, his angry words were as if they had never been spoken:

"I'm quite at sea about it, Fellowes. I can't think how it came about; we've denied him nothing. He has not sent a word to his mother or to me, we are absolutely in the dark. . . ."

Colonel Fellowes hesitated, he did not want to give Dorothea away. He felt he, too, was somewhat to blame. He ought to have got out of the train when they reached Paris. Kiddie ought not to have been left alone. It had been, as he said, a "devil's trick," and the devil's own broth had been served from the brewing. Kiddie's hand had been forced. But Colonel Fellowes hesitated . . . and left the story untold.

He said what he could to comfort the distracted father. Lord Fortive was in no mood to be told of Sarita's charm; but Colonel Fellowes thought he was justified in saying that, beyond the fact that Miss Mainwaring had danced for a very short time at the Verandah Theatre, there was nothing against her personal character. And he adduced Mr. Snape-Mainwaring, and the shipping industry, as a proof of respectability.

"Dorothea warned me," Lord Fortive groaned. "But I was a damned fool, just as great a fool as that unhappy boy. . . ."

Kiddie had not reckoned with the speed and ubiquitousness of the Press, he had forgotten how important adver-

tisement was to the Verandah Theatre Syndicate, and Tom Peters' productions generally.

Twenty-four hours passed before Kiddie's letter came, and it almost seemed then that it had come too late. For all Monte Carlo had heard the news, and Bella Vista was thronged with visitors, Hildegarde's friends, as well as those of her parents, come to sympathize, to condole, in some cases, of course, to exult a little at a misfortune that was not their own. The Fortives had brought up their only son on a "system." The system had broken down, and this alone gave some little excuse for satire and secret rejoicing. Good sons were rare, and the Fortives, in a quiet way, had "swaggered" theirs; their nemesis was upon them swiftly, and the spectacle made for mirth.

Lord Fortive faced the position with dignity, Hildegarde with insatiable curiosity. Lady Dorothea had the privilege of a personal acquaintance with the new Lady Kidderminster, and Lady Dorothea was besought for detail, overwhelmed with inquirers. She was soon in her impish element, inventing, lying, exaggerating, supplying the required gossip, but dumb as to her own share in the catastrophe. She had forgotten it, apparently, before the end of that long day of exhaustive scandal-mongering. Colonel Fellowes almost believed that he had dreamed it, so completely did it escape Lady Dorothea's fickle memory.

But after the first few hours, when no letter arrived, when no telegram came, when there was nothing upon which to feed the starving mother-heart but the newspaper paragraphs, and the idle gossip that Hildegarde, or her maid, brought into the room, Lady Fortive grew faint in watching. Her moral strength and courage held until the last; she *knew* there was some explanation, that her Gilbert had not done this thing wantonly, cruelly. She told his father that again and again. She urged that the explanation

was to come, and begged him to withhold judgment. The hours went by, and her hunger for a word from her boy grew like a living thing, fastening on her where she was weakest. She bore through the day, holding herself bravely; but collapse came in the evening, after the last post. Then, and then only, the taut strings of her heart relaxed, and she went from one alarming fainting fit into another, whilst hastily summoned doctors and nurses brought their feeble science to bear on a case beyond them.

She had been her husband's helpmate. He stood by her bedside all that night, his mind bent on the problem of how to help her. Every other consideration was brushed aside. In her short intervals of consciousness Gilbert's name was always on her lips; she wanted her son.

Lord Fortive was brought to promise that he would try to ascertain Gilbert's whereabouts, that he would send for him if she really wished it. He could not promise forgiveness, but he promised suspension of judgment. The boy should be heard in his own defence. The recurring faintness, or perhaps the remedies employed to strengthen her against them, left her less conscious, and therefore less completely reasonable. Her husband had perforce to put his personal grievance out of mind, to give assurance and reassurance.

"Is Gilbert here? He has written, I know he has written me; he would not have left me without a letter. Such a good son! He has always been such a loving son to me." These were her broken phrases.

"Gilbert," she would call, opening the eyes that could no longer see. "Where is my boy?" she would ask in that faint voice. And smile, thinking the hand that met hers was his. So the long night passed. Again and again they thought she would pass with it. But toward the morning she fell into a calm sleep.

The end of the night's vigil and desperate anxiety was a pink dawn that brought hope, trailing rose and gold over the blue Mediterranean, lighting the sick-room, irradiating the exhaustion of the invalid, flooding through curtains and blinds. And the promise it brought was fulfilled.

The first post brought Gilbert's letter to his mother. It is probable her instinct previsedits coming and calmed her into sleep. They could not wake her for it, every minute she slept was ticking life back for her. Lord Fortive opened the letter, he wanted Gilbert's address, he meant to keep his promise.

This was what Kiddie wrote:

"WHITE HART HOTEL,
"WINDSOR.

"DEAR MATER,

"I suppose you'll be awfully upset to hear I'm married. I don't know what the governor will say, but I'm sure when he sees my Sarita he'll say I was quite right. She reminds me of you in ever so many ways; I know you'll love her. I didn't mean to do it without asking you, but Dolly played me a dirty trick—just like her. She was bringing Sarita out to you, so that you should see her for yourselves, and then she left her alone in Paris, not knowing a word of the language, nor a soul but me. I couldn't stand that, so I got a pal of hers over, Miss Ursula Rugeley. I daresay you know her, she goes in for slumming, and all sorts of charity things. We were married in London, and I've motored here for a few days' honeymooning. I wish I could tell you how I feel. I haven't been much of a fellow up to now, but this will make all the difference. I'm going to ask the governor to let me be his secretary, and I'll get in the House if he wants me to; I'm different about everything.

I suppose every fellow feels like that when he marries, but he don't always get a Sarita. I want to bring her to you. I can't tell what you think about it all, I mean how the governor takes it. I know *you* always wanted me to be happy, and I'm happier than I ever thought I could be. May I come on to the Villa for a bit? Sarita has never seen Monte. I want you to forgive me for not having let you know before, but everything happened in a hurry after that trick Dolly played us. Write me soon. We shall stay here until your letter comes. I'm always, but really more than ever, because I know what it means better,

"Your ever loving son,

"GILBERT."

Lord Fortive read only the address. He did not want to hear Kiddie's excuses, none were possible. But his mother needed him, and the promises of the night must be kept, even if it were no longer a dying woman who had exacted them. When she awoke she should be greeted with the news that her son was on the way to her. Lord Fortive's telegram was brief.

"Your mother needs you come at once Fortive."

The telegram reached Gilbert on the second day of his honeymoon. Already "you" meant Sarita and himself; he could not read it differently. He came into the morning room with the news in his hand, in his eyes and glowing face. Sally read it there and leaped to it.

"They've forgiven you!" she exclaimed.

"Want us to come out at once. Good old pater!"

"What'll they say when they see me?"

"They'll say what a darling you are."

"When will we go?"

"I've ordered the motor round; we'll cut through as

quick as we can. We've missed the morning train, but we'll get to Paris to-night; there's a thing they call the Coté d'Azur will do the trick. How long will you take to pack?"

"Oh, about eight minutes."

"Bravo, you are a brick. I know what they'll say when they see you. . . ."

"Well, not if you hold me like that, I can't do it in the time." But they were only two days married, and the interval for honeymooning was but natural.

He replied lovingly to the telegram. He was completely reassured by it. It never entered his happiness-bemused head that his mother was ill; he thought his letter had moved father and mother to instant advocacy and forgiveness! He had always been a spoiled boy.

"Coming quick as possible, awfully grateful and happy, loving son, Gilbert."

They went straight through, travelling night and day. Sarita's courage in sea-sickness, and in train-fatigue, her loyal desire to meet his instinct for speed made them companions. Perhaps, after all, he had an unacknowledged misgiving. He said, more than once, that he was surprised his father had telegraphed instead of his mother, he seemed to feel there was a necessity for hurry, although his mind held no actual anxiety.

No one met him at the station, and this damped his spirits considerably.

"I can't make it out," he said, looking up and down the platform, "I can't make it out at all." His head had been out of the window at Nice, and again at Beaulieu. He had jumped from the train almost before it had stopped at the Monte Carlo station. And he had been up and down the platform quickly. Now he came back to their carriage. "I can't make it out at all, there is no one here from the Villa!"

"Perhaps it's because it's so early, they didn't expect you until the next train. Let me stay here while you go and see."

"Oh, rot, they wired for us. Come on."

The fly that crawled up to the Bella Vista carried a suddenly perturbed and uneasy Lord Kidderminster and a very over-tired and travel-worn young wife. All the colour and confidence had gone out of her; she felt draggled-tailed and dishevelled, and remembered vividly that she had been a factory girl.

The carriage gates were as yet unopened; it really seemed as if they were not expected. There was no sign of welcome; the garden lay green and beautiful in the sunlight, the palms waved to them, the syringas and roses flung out their generous sweets, but that was all.

"There does not seem anybody about. Do you mind waiting in the fly whilst I go and rout them out?"

Sarita minded nothing. Gilbert was through the gates and up the winding gravel path before she had time to answer. No one was in the garden, no one was on the verandah; the green door was closed, instead of hospitably open as of old. A vigorous pull of the bell gave but a muffled sound. At length it brought the butler, the unfamiliar Italian butler, who eyed the intruder doubtfully:

"Hullo! Where is Bystairs? Don't you know me? What the devil are you staring at? Where is my father?" began impetuous Kiddie.

"I don't think his lordship is seeing visitors," stammered the man, in his native tongue, bewildered, inadequate.

"I'm not a visitor, you ass, I'm his son. Where is he?"

Hildegarde, hearing voices, came out of the morning room. "Hush!" she said, "hush, she must not be disturbed, nor woke out of her sleep, for anything." Then she caught

sight of her young brother. "Oh, it's you. You mustn't wake her, do keep quiet."

"Who! What?"

"Didn't you know mother was ill!"

The news staggered him.

"The mater? No! Why? How should I know? Nobody told me. She is sure to have heard my voice. I'd better go straight up. Look after Sarita for me, will you, she's outside. She ought to go straight to bed; she's done to the world. We came as quick as we could."

It was Hildegarde's turn to exclaim —

"What! You've brought her with you?"

"Of course. Where's the governor?"

Hildegarde could not tackle the situation.

"He is in there;" she indicated her father's study. "You really can't go up until they have prepared her. Did they know, they did not know, surely, that you were bringing . . . anybody with you?" The euphemism meant his wife.

Kiddie paused with his hand on the handle of his father's door:

"You didn't think I was coming alone, did you?"

The news of his mother's illness had seized him by the throat; he was chilled on the threshold of his home.

But he had little time for preparation, for now Lord Fortive had heard his voice:

"That you, Gilbert? I had not expected you so soon, I did not think you could have made your arrangements so quickly, we were hardly looking for you until the afternoon."

The words were commonplace, almost kindly; indeed, Lord Fortive was glad he was here. But Kiddie's courage left him suddenly. He was shocked to see the change in his father's face, the greyness and fatigue — or was it grief?

"The mater . . . ?" he began quickly, his breath uneven.

"Is better, much better; it was touch-and-go when we wired you, but she is much better, sleeping quietly. The news struck her down, like a blow from a fist; she could not believe it of you. Neither could I."

He paused, he did not mean to make a scene, he wanted to carry out the spirit, not the letter only, of what he had promised in that anxious night.

"Come in," he went on, "sit down. You can't go up until she has been prepared." He spoke more slowly than usual, heavily. Kiddie's heart was full, he had expected anger, perhaps, not grief; he loved his parents.

"I never meant it, believe me, sir, I never meant it; it was . . ." the boy began, although speech was chilled in him.

"I can't hear now, I've promised your mother she should see you first. You will remember she is very weak, hardly out of danger; for the moment we must think of nothing but what is best for her."

"I'll go up as soon as I may. I'll explain everything." Gilbert was very pale. "But Sarita . . ."

Lord Fortive could hardly believe the news that was being conveyed to him:

"You don't mean to say you have had the insolence, the bad taste, to bring that woman here?" Lord Fortive's face grew very red, and the veins in his forehead worked a little, but he tried to restrain himself.

Kiddie went a little whiter, and began to see that he had make a mistake.

"Here, where your mother and sister are, to expose *them* to the contamination of this woman. . . . It's—it's infamous; it is an outrage . . ."

"Father"—Kiddie's voice was choked, and his words were difficult—"it is my wife, my *wife* you are speaking of . . ."

"The more shame to you. The wife you picked out of a stew! How dared you bring her here, how dared you?"

"Father!"

Now there was a high anger in Kiddie's voice, a rising, threatening passion.

But Lord Fortive had had two nights' watching. The words had been beating on his brain all these forty-eight hours, fighting for utterance.

"Don't try and tell me. I know the farmyard morality of the chorus girl, the . . ."

But Kiddie, although shaken and shocked by the news of his mother's illness, and the sight of his father's face, would not let him say more. He seized his arm, he forgot his respect:

"Be quiet," he said, "be quiet. . ."

He was in great trouble, he knew now he had been selfish, impetuous; his father's face told him of the suffering he had caused, but his new, sensitive manhood, and the pride of it, set his blood on fire:

"I won't hear, I won't listen. I am going to my wife. We stand or fall together. How dare you speak so of her! Sir, it is you who forget yourself," he said, beside himself with rage. Now he made for the door:

"I'm going now. You sent for us, or I should not have come. I'm going, I won't come back. I'll come nowhere she isn't respected. . . ."

"You forget your mother," Lord Fortive said, in a milder voice. It was true he had been wrong, Kiddie's passion-torn voice proved it. The "slut" was his wife; that was the way Lord Fortive worded his apology to himself.

"Perhaps I have said too much; I know more of these theatre women than you do. I suppose you were drunk, or drugged."

But Kiddie had not stayed to hear more. He was out of the room, brushing past Hildegarde, who was waiting aimlessly in the hall, and a couple of curious servants; he was out of the house, through the palms, past the syringas, before they had realized his flight, getting as quickly as he could to the carriage, where Sally waited, half asleep in the sun. He got in beside her:

"To the Hotel de Paris," he said to the *cocher*. His voice was a sobbing breath.

Her startled eyes saw his face, and her quick intuition hit upon the truth.

"It wasn't me they wanted, it was you, without me?"

He took her hand and held it in his; Kiddie had borne all that he was able, his voice was quite broken:

"My mother is ill; I did not see my mother."

He could not tell Sarita what had occurred, he said the first thing that came to his lips. His mother's illness must account for his agitation, for everything.

"Ill! Oh! poor Gilbert."

She put his hand against her cheek.

"Poor Gilbert," she said again. "Never mind talking. You'll go back to her soon; never mind about me, I'll be all right alone, I can look after myself; I've got hold of a few French words, I'll make myself understood."

How quick she was in sympathy, surely there had never been any one like her!

"You just see me to the hotel. Barlow will soon have the luggage up, and you can change and get comfy. You'll be back in a couple of hours."

"To think that at my own father's house . . ." there was actually a sob in his throat at the thought that she had been turned from his father's house.

"Don't you go thinking, you're too tired. They didn't expect you'd have brought me along. I must have looked

a sight if they saw me out of the window. But just wait till I'm togged up; they'll think different of me then."

Her hand in his comforted him a little.

At the *Paris* he was solicitous for her comfort. All at once, and it was a unique experience for him, his own seemed of little moment. The best suite of rooms must be prepared for Lady Kidderminster, the bath must be got ready, the coffee brought up; Kiddie issued peremptory orders, and they were quickly obeyed. It was a relief to him to be doing something for her, he must make up to her for what his father had said.

By the time Barlow arrived Sally was half-way to the completion of her toilette, she would have been through with it if Kiddie had not had something very like a breakdown, when he had taken her in his arms, and talked rather wildly about her being miles too good for him, whatever anybody thought, and about his father's vile insinuations, and other matters that Sally brushed away with her usual good sense.

"You are overtired, that's what you are. You have your bath, and see how different you'll feel about it then. He did not mean it, didn't your father. Look how early it is. He's upset, too, it's natural enough if his wife's ill. Wait till you've all had breakfast. How would you like it, if I'd been taken bad? You wouldn't be so civil to everybody if I was ill. He didn't know what he was saying, most like."

But she liked his clinging to her, and perhaps his breakdown, that she could soothe. She was stronger than he, though neither of them realized it yet. And what did opposition matter, seeing they were married, and nobody could unmarry them? Her simplicity did not dive beyond the obvious. If the worst came to the worst, and Lord Fortive would not forgive Gilbert for marrying her, nor

give him any money to live upon, she would go back to the stage; they weren't tired of her dancing yet. Mr. Peters' last words to her had been that he hoped to see her back at the Verandah. Meanwhile there was that question of bath and breakfast.

She had almost restored Kiddie to his wonted good humour, anyway she had quite restored him to his pride in being her husband when a breathless messenger rushed in from the Villa Bella Vista.

Lord Fortive had had a hurried summons from the Foreign Office, and was starting immediately for London. Lord Kidderminster must please come at once to his mother.

"Is that all the message? Did they only say me?"

He was not going; he said so at once.

"Tell my father I shall not come. I told him the only terms upon which I would come back."

His face grew quite set, his young obstinacy braced itself. He had finished his breakfast, and the tray still stood upon the table. Now he wanted a smoke, and the paper, with Sally beside him on the couch, leaning against him whilst he read. He wanted the conjugal after-breakfast feeling of which his short honeymoon had already taught him the charm. He did not want to go back to the Villa, and fight her, or his own, battles; he wanted to rest.

"I shan't come."

It was far in the afternoon before wiser counsels prevailed, before Sally had persuaded him she didn't care what anybody said about her:

"It wasn't as if he'd seen me; and if he had, out of the window, by chance, goodness knows what I looked like! You'll be sorry if you don't go up to her. She's been ill, and you ought to go. We'll walk round together; I don't

suppose they'd mind if I waited in the garden, or hung round the gate until you come out . . ."

It was true that Sally had a great deal to learn. And even now Kiddie was impatient in teaching. He scouted the idea of her being received on sufferance. She should not go near the Villa until they invited her properly. They must remember what was due to Lady Kidderminster, she must remember her position. . . .

"I can't remember anything but there's your mother waiting to see you," was Sally's answer to that, "and she ill, too; and so fond of you she's always been. . . ."

But he did not go willingly, and not until the pencil lines were brought to him, feebly scrawled —

"Come to me, dear. I cannot come to you. Mother."

CHAPTER XXIII

IT was, nevertheless, fortunate that Raisuli had chosen this moment to make Sir Harry Maclean his captive. The ferment in Morocco having aroused the Powers to a tardy intervention, Lord Fortive had been selected by the greatest diplomat of them all as the most fitting person to undertake a delicate preliminary skirmish of documents. Lord Fortive's journey to London was expedited by a special train, and Kiddie was not called upon to confront his father whilst his blood was still hot from the remembrance of the epithets hurled at his young wife.

Kiddie was in no humour to make allowances for any one who did not appreciate Sally. He was in love with her. If her wealth of hair and wild young grace, her white skin, red lips, and the smiles that flashed from them, had attracted him at a distance, they had certainly not proved less enthralling when he had the freedom of them. She had been shy with him, and he realized the quality of her shyness. It was not because she thought of, or remembered, that she was Sally Snape, and he Lord Kidderminster, but because all her quick comprehension and ability were momentarily bewildered by new emotions, new conditions, new experiences. Yet how had she borne herself? No girl, bred in the purple, could have shown herself more naturally modest than this daughter of the slums. The attack that his father had made upon her, from the position he had taken up, had overwhelmed the boy at first. Now his swelling resentment

blocked out his father's point of view, he could see only his own. And that was why it was well that Raisuli was on the war-path and Lord Fortive required so urgently at the Foreign Office. It was not the moment for father and son to meet.

There is little or no limit to the influence that can be exercised by a good wife, who is also an intelligent woman, over a clever man who realizes her. Lord Fortive may have had his defects as a husband; his wife was frequently an invalid, and the necessities of his official life made it impossible for him to play the nurse, and surround her with his personal tenderness and attention. Also, perhaps, his temperament would have made that rôle an uncongenial one for him to play; and, although the greater passion of her life was for her son, she cared too much for her husband, and too little for herself, to have wished him to play an uncongenial rôle.

But, on the other hand, he had a fine appreciation, a connoisseur's appreciation, of his wife's quality. She had never attempted to guide him, but there had been many times when he had found his own judgment strengthened by adopting her point of view. She had a clear, sane grasp of difficult problems. There were few men with whom he cared to discuss ethical questions, but Lady Fortive had the talent of her virtues, a rare gift. And it was, perhaps, in some way due to her that he had held and kept the prestige of high conduct and noble aims, an Imperialism that could not stoop to mean or personal gain, a patriotism that had illumined both his policy and his diplomacy.

He had gone up to her as soon as she was awake.

"Gilbert came by the early train; he must have started the day before yesterday, the moment he got our wire."

"I knew he would," she answered softly. "I knew my boy would come to me."

"But he has had the impudence to bring the woman with him!"

She lay quite still, for a moment. She had, in her weakness, forgotten that this would happen; it was so new, so strange, to think of Gilbert with a wife. Now she must learn that he was no longer wholly hers. She lay quiet, tasting the bitterness of it.

"He could not well have left her alone on her honeymoon," she murmured, almost to herself. Already she began to see what she must do, what they must both sacrifice.

Lord Fortive took his seat by her couch, he could see the ravages fatigue or emotion had made; the sweet, lined face was small and grey, the eyes were dark and sunken. But the spirit in them was clear and strong, and answered the question in his almost before it was spoken.

"Is it your view that we should treat the boy as if he had done nothing disgraceful?"

"*Has* he done anything disgraceful?" she breathed.

"Or anything unusual? Should we receive this Verandah Theatre girl, allow her to associate with our daughters, our friends . . ."

"Is that what you said to him?"

"Practically."

"He had brought her here with him, sure of our welcome?"

"We are not responsible for that."

"Are we not?"

She smiled faintly at him, and already he knew that, whatever Gilbert had done, Gilbert had not been fairly treated in his home-coming.

"What do you want me to do?" he said, more gently, touched by her pallor; for the trouble was hers, even more than his. "You are always right; tell me what we must do."

"He will be in a very difficult position," she answered, after a pause. For she was the daughter of the Earl of Fountayne, and her mother had been a Montgomery. It cannot be imagined that she realized, without suffering, that the blood flowing in the veins of her son's wife was of such different quality. No woman less prejudiced, she still had her prejudices, and in the deepest recess of her inner consciousness, notwithstanding all she said and did, was the feeling that a girl who exposes herself, or her accomplishments, behind the glare of the footlights, to any vulgarian who pays his sixpence or his guinea for the privilege of beholding them, is outside the sympathy or understanding of modest wives or mothers, whose talents are for the home.

"He has made a damned fool of himself, if that is what you mean, and wrecked his career. As for difficulty, there is no difficulty in living with a chorus girl if we supply him with the means. And there need be no question of that."

He was going to yield, he knew he was going to yield every single thing she asked of him. He had not realized it in the first moments of that unexpected interview with his son. But Gilbert had done the best thing possible in bringing his wife home to his father's house; he had proved his own faith in her. And what was this story about Dorothea and a trap? Already rumours about it had reached Monte Carlo. Gilbert's letter said something about a trick. And Dolly had hardly been able to refrain from boasting of her good intentions. Hildegarde had conveyed something of it to her father.

"I don't see his difficulties," he said again. "As far as politics are concerned, he has, of course, done for himself completely. There is no place to-day for a man who has notoriously made a fool of himself with a woman."

"He is not the first man, dear, even in our order, to take a wife from the stage."

"True!"

Lord Fortive quickly gave a list of titled blackguards, whose conjugal infelicities with their congenial partners were notorious. She was not too feeble to cap this with another, which, beginning in the eighteenth century with the ancestors of her husband's immediate and best friend, went on to his own day, with one royal example, and two equally successful.

She knew that Gilbert's wife, Lady Kidderminster, should not have been turned from the door. And he knew it too.

"We know nothing against her," she urged, a little faintly perhaps. How could she plead for the girl, or woman, who had robbed her of her boy?

"The Verandah Theatre is not a notorious school for saints."

"She was only on the stage three months, Hilda told me. And he seems to have looked after her all that time."

"It's a pity he did not go on looking after her," he said, under his breath.

"She may have fine qualities."

"She may. . . . But at present the only one of which we have heard is her high kick!"

The invalid went on as if she had not heard him. It was herself she was persuading.

"What will become of them if we fail to countenance the marriage?"

Lord Fortive knew, perhaps even better than his wife, that Mayfair has its divisions and subdivisions. That ostracized corner which an ill-informed Press and priesthood advertise and preach against under the pseudonymous title of the "Smart Set," has a disgraceful existence in the purlieus. But it is no more representative of society, in the sense of the word that Lady Fortive understood it, than the

loiterers in Piccadilly are representative of the modest and self-respecting members of the middle and working classes from which such unfortunates are recruited.

"If we set the example of ignoring Gilbert and his wife, we cannot expect that . . ." she mentioned the names of people who count, not "smart" people, but worthy ones, "will receive them. What will become of them?"

Lord Fortive was not anxious for argument; on some points, at least, he knew his attitude to be indefensible.

"Don't worry about their reception in society," he said drily, for his sense of humour was never wholly in abeyance. "Lady Avon will call upon them — in Lent."

"But what she will give is Lenten fare, meatless, meagre, and unsatisfying," was the gentle retort. Their intelligence was too nearly on a par for him to be able to fence with her without getting touched.

They had not carried the matter much further when the King's Messenger arrived with that peremptory recall to duty. Then all was bustle and preparation; the whole household was requisitioned to expedite Lord Fortive's departure. Many loose ends in his correspondence had to be gathered up, and possible emergencies provided for, or met. Gilbert's affairs had perforce to be thrust into the background, when Imperial interests were to the fore. A message was sent to him, but the bearer of it came back without an answer.

"I do not like leaving you, with everything so unsettled. I sent a man over to the *Paris*, to tell Gilbert I was leaving, but there was no reply," Lord Fortive told her, when everything had been done, when the last five minutes had come, and he was here again in the sick-room to bid his wife goodbye. All the despatches had been concluded, the luggage had gone on; from the upper windows of the villa already the special train could be seen, getting up steam. "Do

what you think best about the boy. I will put an inquiry or so through, in town, and let you know what I hear. I wish you were stronger; I wish I were leaving you looking more like yourself."

"I am getting well, I really am. I slept three hours last night. I shall sleep better still to-night, after I have seen Gilbert. You can go away without anxiety, I promise to be up to receive you when you return."

She smiled at him; she was quite brave and confident. They had known for a long time that her tenure of life was uncertain. "The attack has passed, I am safe for the time being. This is not the end, believe me, I am on the road to recovery. You give me full power with him, and . . . with her?"

"Do what you think best. I am afraid he'll have a bitter awakening. Don't be unhappier about it than you can help. Good-bye, good-bye, take care of yourself for all our sakes."

He was gone.

It was not until an hour or so later, an hour or two during which she lay gathering her strength, that she sent that pencilled note to Gilbert asking him to come to her, since she could not come to him. But it was not the note, it was Sally's influence, that drove Kiddie out of the Hotel de Paris, across the sunlit gardens, to the Villa Bella Vista. And it was still a reluctant Gilbert who came. He could not forget how he had rushed from the house this morning, and with what good cause.

Lady Fortive, hardly out of danger, still prone in a darkened room, feeble from those persistent attacks of faintness, saw, before Gilbert had uttered more than a half a dozen words, that he had been wounded, and was sullen from the pain of his hurt. She had read his honeymoon letter, it was even now under her pillow; and divining mother-love suddenly made his amazing marriage almost clear to her.

"Hullo! Mater," he began, as if he had seen her but yesterday, "sorry to see you so seedy. What has been the matter?"

It was stupid of Hildegarde and the nurse to have "jawed" at him about the necessity for calm, for not agitating the invalid. He was not going to make a scene. He kissed her perfunctorily. "What has been the matter?" he repeated.

"Nothing much; the heat has tried me. You know I am never very strong."

He flung himself into a chair.

"It's this beastly place, I always said it was unhealthy." His voice was toneless, if he were moved by the sight of her he would not show it. She saw how he had been hurt, wounded in his pride and good feeling.

"Has the pater gone?" he went on, knowing the answer beforehand, but thinking it necessary to keep up the conversation.

"Yes, he had a special."

Then there was a pause. Kiddie had come here this morning, full of emotion, eager for forgiveness, had come to his home, as an only son does, taking his welcome for granted. This was a different mood; it was he who had been wronged. She understood, she understood from the very beginning. It was only love that could renew that wounded spirit of his, mother-love. She only paused for strength:

"Gilbert."

He came over to her again at that call, apparently reluctantly:

"Here, you must not excite yourself, you know; they'll turn me out if you do."

Her eyes pleaded with him.

"Got anything to say?" he asked indifferently.

"Everything."

She smiled at him, the always loving smile, and he melted at it, inside. But how was he to know she had not backed up his father? They had turned his young wife from the door. He hardened himself against her:

"Go ahead, then," he said, "I'm listening."

"I wish I had been up this morning."

"Oh! that's all right, it didn't matter."

"But you brought her to me."

He gave a short laugh:

"That's where I went wrong. Don't worry; we're very comfortable at the *Paris*."

"But I want so much to see her."

"To see her!"

"To see my son's wife, is that strange?"

"Mater!"

He could not harden himself for long. She put up her arms to draw him down to her, his head lay a moment on her breast; he felt her trembling, loving hands caress his hair, and a sob broke from him:

"You don't know the things the governor said about her."

"He did not mean them, dear. You startled us."

"But I wrote . . ."

"Your letter came late. He read it first in the papers."

"Mater!"

"My darling?"

"You know I didn't mean it like that."

"I know, I know."

"Is it my fault you've been so ill?"

"No, no."

"You do forgive me?"

"My son, my dear, dear son."

She could only hold him there, murmuring over him.

She had never failed him, she was not going to fail him

now. It was true he was her spoilt boy and darling, "such a good son he had always been to her!" She told him that:

"I know you never meant to hurt me. Don't be unhappy, Gilbert, don't cry, I can't bear it, I can bear anything but that! I wanted you should never have an unhappy moment. That was my prayer, from the first moment they put you in my arms. Tell your mammy all about it, little son; tell me all the trouble, and I'll make it well."

She was back in the nursery with him.

They allowed themselves a rare moment, uncontrolled. Notwithstanding the warnings, it did her no harm. How should it, when he took her in his strong, young arms to calm her, reproaching himself? And from sobs they went to laughter, as she murmured baby talk. She touched all the new tenderness in him with the old tenderness that had kept his boyhood and manhood sweet. It was only his unhappiness, or his self-reproaches, that she could not bear. She had spent half a lifetime in taking stones from his path, rolling the pitch smooth for him. The sob, the cry of "mater" from him, blotted out all he had done.

Very soon he was ashamed of his emotion, but she knew how to cover that, lying back on her pillows, feigning perhaps a greater weakness than she felt, that he might have excuse to pet her, to hold her hand in his.

"You are all right?" he asked more than once. He had been outside himself, not normal, but he recovered quickly. "Ought you not to have brandy, or something?"

"No! It is doing me all the good in the world to see you here. Can you stay a little?"

"As long as you like. I made Sarita go to bed. We travelled night and day, and she got no sleep in the train. She's got the pluck of half a dozen men."

"Poor child! Oh, how I wish I had been there this morning to care for her."

That nearly broke him down again. "She . . . she has got to learn things perhaps. She . . . she *is* only a child, mater. I . . . I love her, be good to her," he pleaded.

"Have I not always cared for your pets?" she answered softly.

And then they were silent again for a little while.

"I want to tell you all about it."

"Tell me, tell me everything."

"Do you mind if I walk about? It doesn't fidget you?"

"My dear! nothing you do fidgets me."

He told his story, walking up and down her room, his eyes were not always quite dry, nor were hers. And on the whole he told his story well:

"I struggled against it, mater, all the time. I fought against it; I knew it would be a disappointment to you. . . . I tried . . ."

He could not tell his mother what he had hoped, meant, intended, what it was he had tried, and failed, to do to Sally. He could not look into those pure, loving eyes and say the words: "It was the thing all men do, that was in my mind at first." He could not say that to his mother. Nevertheless he told his story well. For he told of Sarita's purity, and the childlike quality of her courage. She had stood alone in the world, pitting her simplicity and industry against all the forces arrayed against her:

"Mater, it is her character that has stood. Don't believe, don't let any one ever make you believe, I cared for anything else. She has the faith of a child, the courage of a man; her soul is as clean and as white as . . . as yours, mater. You know I couldn't say it, if it were not true."

"I know, my darling, I know."

"She does not know what it is to lie; her lips are as clean as her heart, mater."

Then he tried to tell her other things, sacred things;

that, with this purity of heart and soul, she still would have given herself to him, in love, in great love, if he would have taken the gift. He told her of Dorothea's trick; and how it might have worked if Sarita had been different.

"I know there are good girls, in our own world, girls who are as you must have been. But I did not meet one like my Sarita. Perhaps I ought to have waited, to have looked about more. But I'm not clever, you and the governor have never quite known how inferior I am to you both!"

She winced at that, he had touched a wound; it had always lain there, that little tender consciousness that Gilbert was not so clever as her husband, perhaps even not quite so quick in thought as herself. And so had the more need of mother-love and care about him.

"Not inferior, Gilbert," she interrupted, "younger, less experienced." The tenderness of her wavering smile made him look away:

"Well, not so clever as my father, nor so good as you. But this will make all the difference. I shall have to take care of her. And, mater, she . . . she thinks the world of me!"

He was back by the bed again, his cheek against hers on the pillow, showing his heart to her, knowing she was with him.

"I mean to be worth it, worth what she thinks. I'll want help . . ."

"My boy!"

"You'll help me and her?"

"I won't fail you."

She had never failed him.

It was after that she said she wished he had "given his father more time." It was the only word of reproach that fell from her lips, the only word of rebuke.

CHAPTER XXIV

MONTE CARLO afforded a strange experience for Sally Snape during the next few days, whilst Lady Fortive slowly regained her normal ill-health, and Gilbert sat daily with her dilating always upon the charm of his young wife.

He had a vague idea that Sally should spend these hours reposing in a darkened room. But she flouted the idea scornfully:

"What's the matter with me that I should lie down in the daytime, like a cat on the hearthrug or a dog in the sun? I'll go out and see the shops and the people. Don't you worry about me."

But it was natural he should worry about her, for he could not be ignorant of the fact that, when he took her to lunch at Ciro's, or to dine at the Restaurant de Paris, on the terrace of the Casino in the morning hour, or the inevitable drive to Cap Martin in the afternoon, she was the cynosure of all eyes.

Every one knew their story. The fame of her dancing, too, lost nothing in the telling, and her reputation took a different colour from every breath that filmed or burnished it.

It was on the terrace they met Colonel Fellowes and Lady Dorothea, met them in a way that made some sort of recognition unavoidable. Lady Dorothea greeted Kiddie with outstretched hand, as if nothing had occurred:

"Hullo, Kiddie! my congratulations."

Kiddie rudely ignored her hand, and would have passed on. But that she would not allow. Seeing which, Colonel Fellowes wisely addressed himself to Sally, talking amiable commonplaces, whilst the others, a little out of earshot, could have their opportunity for mutual recrimination.

"You were not going to pass without saying 'how do you do' to me, were you? I'll talk to your wife presently, she is quite safe with Freddy. What! Still angry with me?"

"I don't want to talk to you."

"How silly of you! Aren't you satisfied? I heard from Hildegarde you were simply fatuous about her. You know you owe it to me that you are married, you ought to be awfully grateful. The diplomatist will come round in no time, he always had a fancy for red-haired coryphées; and you've squared your mother already, I'm told."

"It was a foul, unwomanly trick." He reddened as he added, "You know what you had in your mind. The result has nothing to do with it."

"How could I tell you would take it like that? A Verandah Theatre girl!"

But she did not want, even now, to quarrel with Kiddie. She wanted to argue, to explain, to prove her righteousness of motive. "You must not forget she was a Verandah Theatre girl . . ." she urged.

"A girl whose shoe-strings you are not fit to tie," he was goaded to retort. He wanted to get away; but she detained him, arguing her point of view.

Meanwhile Colonel Fellowes had heard that Sally "could not abide" the pigeon shooting, and hated the rooms, where, however, she had been only once. But she had bought dresses at Beer's, and hats at Louis'; Kiddie had hired a motor and taken her to Nice, and she thought Nice was awfully gay, a little like Brighton.

"It will take Kiddie all he knows to get her accepted," Colonel Fellowes said afterwards to Dolly. "When you've granted her figure and hair, you've said all you can in her favour. She is absolutely the crudest thing I've ever met."

And Dolly, moved in all her shallow depths to anger against her cousin, was glad that it should be so. Perhaps Colonel Fellowes had an intuition of her mental attitude and spoke tactfully, he always had a soothing effect upon her.

Kiddie, each day's intimacy with his wife showing him more clearly the transparency of her motives and aims, grew each day more resentful of interested glances, and light laughter, of the superior "poor old Kiddie" air that his friends affected when they spoke to him, of the whole atmosphere in which this marriage of his seemed to be regarded. He had more than one passage of words with his sister. All his sensitiveness was exposed; he was constantly being jarred. There were many of his mother's acquaintances in Monte Carlo this Easter. And in Monte Carlo one meets the same people three and four times a day. He met them at the Villa, on the Terrace, at Ciro's, everywhere. And within a week he had more or less offended them all.

His mother had expressed a desire to see Sarita, but a word from Hildegarde had provoked his obstinacy, and now he said that since his father had refused her admittance, she should not come again to the house until he invited her there himself. Lady Fortive could not fight this mood, she knew what lay beneath it, and she trusted to time. Meanwhile she tried what she could, with gentle counsel, to harden Kiddie's attitude toward the world.

And Sally, whom she had never seen, was, nevertheless, on her side. Sally could see no sneer, detect no covert

insult, when this or the other introduction, forced upon her unwilling husband, resulted in his abruptly taking her away, in his sudden ill-temper or brusquerie.

"What's the matter with you? I don't know what I ought to do when people come up to us, you're so queer about it. Don't you want me to know your friends?"

"I want them to treat you with proper respect," he answered. "They'll have to remember you are Lady Kidderminster. It is my father's fault, and Dolly's; they've set the keynote. . . ."

But in truth most of Kiddie's grievances were imaginary. The young men were naturally eager for the acquaintance. Sally was looking her very best just now; the cocottes and demi-mondaines, the stale demi-vierges and old stagers contrasted hopelessly with her eager youth and astonishing freshness. The revealing sun showed her unflawed white skin, without paint, without powder; if its insistent presence left a few playful freckles as visiting cards, it compensated for them by adding scarlet to the soft child-lips, and gold to the red of the rebellious hair. All the new dresses were white, Kiddie had insisted upon that, and all the new hats were black, Sally's good taste had discovered the value of the juxtaposition. Only the materials and textures varied. In white cloth and ermine, white muslin with Irish lace, white *crêpe de Chine* with silver embroideries, and always the black picture hats, Lady Kidderminster was far and away the most noticeable figure in the principality.

The first day that Lady Fortive was able to leave her room, she told the boy she would call upon his wife. But this, too, Kiddy negatived.

"No, it's awfully good of you, and I know all that it means; but I shan't let you do it without the governor. And Hilda, too, will have to climb down. I'm not going

to have Sarita received on sufferance. And I won't let her meet Dolly. . . ."

"I have already given orders that Lady Dorothea is not to be admitted. I am quite at one with you as to her conduct."

Incidentally it may be noted that this was the beginning of the end, as far as Lady Dorothea's social career was concerned. It was intimated to her that very season that she was not expected to attend a Court. She sank gradually into a quagmire of middle-class acquaintances, whose position left them ignorant that her vices were her own, and not those of a class whom she had ceased to represent.

Lady Fortive told Kiddie that she had heard from his father, and, in calling upon Sarita, she would be acting in accordance with his wishes. Lord Fortive had known where to put through his inquiries respecting his undesirable daughter-in-law, and had learnt that there was nothing to be said against her. She was too young to have had a past, and it was true that Kiddie had been her protector since she had been seen upon the boards.

"If she is in any way possible," he wrote, "we will carry out your suggestion. If you feel yourself able to present her at the first Court, the rest will follow. It is a bitter disappointment, of course. But Hildegarde's alliance, with which we were so gratified, has not turned out an unmitigated success. Gilbert's marriage may not prove an unmitigated failure. From what you tell me, it appears already to have made something more of a man of him. I hear there will be a vacancy shortly at Malling; you might sound him as to his views. . . ."

The letter went on to adjure her to take care of her health, and to give her the welcome news that he would be free to return by the end of the week.

Lady Fortive and Hildegarde called upon Lady Kidder-

minster in state, taking pains that the whole of Monte Carlo should know, not only of the intention, but of the execution. It made no difference that only cards were left. Lady Fortive had not announced her visit to Kiddie, and the young people were out.

Sally came back to the hotel alone. Gilbert, in an after-luncheon mood, had gone into the rooms for half an hour. Meanwhile Sally was to have dressed for a motor ride. She found the magic pieces of pasteboard upon the table.

"Oh! that's good of her! She's come to see me after all! Gilbert *will be* pleased. I'll go round and thank her," she exclaimed.

Sally had not completely understood the etiquette that kept her from the Villa. Gilbert had said that he would not allow her to go there until Lady Fortive had called upon her. Impulsive Sally was so glad the prohibition must now be removed, she did not pause to consider what further formalities should be observed. She snatched up the gloves and parasol she had discarded, she did not even wait to readjust her hat, or hair, to change her white linen for an afternoon dress.

"I'll show her I don't bear malice because they wouldn't let me in when we first came. I'll go round at once and thank her," was in the girl's mind, as she went down the big broad stairs of the hotel, two steps at a time, across the sunlit gardens, and away to the Villa.

This time the gates stood open, Lady Fortive's carriage having not long gone through. There were voices echoing through the palms, with a flutter of skirts and femininity.

There had been a luncheon-party at the Villa — Lady Avon and the Astoraths, Lord Northbury and Victor Herold. They were all on the verandah; fortunately Lady Fortive was there too, on her couch. She had not joined them at lunch, but they had come out to her when they had fin-

ished. No one guessed who it was hurrying up the garden; Hildegarde and Lady Fortive failed to recognize her, looking at each other with puzzled eyes.

"An unexpected guest . . . ?"

But Sally left them no time for conjecture. She came up in the swiftness of her young grace and made straight for the couch:

"It *was* good of you to come and see me. It was horrid our being out. I've wanted to come to you all the time, but Gilbert wouldn't let me," she began breathlessly.

Lady Fortive went a little pale; her heart seemed about to play her an unkind trick.

"Get brandy, she has startled my mother," Hilda said quickly, coming through the group of her amused friends. "My mother is not well, . . ." she began, stiffly, to Sarita, who remained standing.

"Quite well enough to welcome my dear daughter-in-law," Lady Fortive found strength to say, holding out her hand to Sally. Sally took it:

"You do look bad," she said. And some one tittered.

The titter was as effective as the delayed brandy.

"Do I?" the invalid answered, with a white smile, "then you must sit down beside me, and talk to me until I am better. Is Gilbert with you?"

"No! I didn't wait till he got back. When I saw your cards, I came as quick as I could. I've wanted to come all the time."

"No doubt," said some one, under her breath.

"And I have wanted you to come," answered her mother-in-law. "I wanted to see my son's wife."

The girl was so much younger in her ways than she had expected, so unaffected, untheatrical, genuinely simple, and interested in Kiddie's mother because she was that, and not because she was the Marchioness of Fortive, that her

heart went out to her. Sally needed protection, too, one could see that instantly; her ways, mode of speech and thought, were different from theirs.

"May I really sit here and talk to you? Don't the others want this seat?" She had taken the one by the couch; Lady Fortive had indicated she was to do so.

"I am sorry you're looking so bad," she went on. "Gilbert said you were ever so much better! He *does* worry so about being with both of us. He hates not being able to sit with you, without leaving me alone. I don't mind being alone a bit; although," she added candidly, as an afterthought, but Sally had to be quite candid, until she had learnt better — "of course, it's a change not having anything to do. I don't like that."

"Don't you play *trente-et-quarante?*" asked Lord Northbury, disengaging himself from the women, equally curious but less tactful. He was a well-known habitué of Monte Carlo, tall and stooping, brown-bearded and bright-eyed. He had lost three fortunes gambling, but still appreciated the existence of other goddesses, of whom this slim, red-haired girl was surely one. "Damned lucky young cub, our Cousin Kiddie," he said *sotto voce*, to Victor Herold, who was beside him. They had both caught Sally's words, her complaint of having nothing to do.

"You should play *trente-et-quarante*," Lord Northbury said to Sally, looking at her appreciatively. "I heard you complaining about having nothing to do here, didn't I? Of course, they ought to lay out a golf course. . . ."

"I did not know you had been introduced to my daughter-in-law," Lady Fortive interposed, with gentle formality. "My dear, may I present our cousins, Lord Northbury, Mr. Victor Herold."

From the first Lady Fortive would insist upon Sarita's dignity being observed; she supported Gilbert in his point

of view. But it was not always easy to show Sarita where that same dignity was being assailed. She answered Lord Northbury quite easily, and would have done so with or without the introduction:

"No, I don't play cards; it's so stuffy in the Casino, too. I don't play golf neither. I like the gardens, and looking at the sea." She was not in the least shy, and she was pleased Gilbert's mother had said "my dear" to her. She broke into a dazzling laugh:

"Not that I ought to be fond of the sea, for it don't agree with me when I'm on it."

"Ah! but that is the Channel, this is the Mediterranean," Victor said familiarly. He knew the type, or flattered himself that he did. He had spent the greater part of his life pursuing adventures with demi-mondaines; he spoke as he would to one of these.

Sally looked at him; he was good-looking in a pallid, well-groomed way, but she thought she liked his brother best.

"Is it? I thought it was all the same," she answered, smiling again. "Here's your brandy. . . ."

She darted at the butler who was bringing it, carefully, on a silver tray. She took it from him and brought it without spilling, although the liqueur-glass was full. Lady Fortive drank the brandy; she needed it badly. Giving back the glass with a smile, she said to Sally —

"Thank you, it was very good of you to fetch it. These Italian servants are so slow."

"Oh! I like doing things for you. Let me come and stay, and help nurse you. I'll be as quiet as quiet; nothing tires me. I should love to serve you, . . ." she said impetuously.

She had no motive, no *arrière pensée*, as she stooped over the couch and pleaded to be allowed to come and stay.

The two men, watching her with admiring eyes, thought she was amazingly clever. But, in truth, she forgot they were there, and she was not clever at all. She had only fallen in love with Gilbert's mother, this poor, grey lady, with Kiddie's eyes and voice, and such gentle ways and smile; she was only moved to sorrow for her, because she seemed so frail, and had to lie on a couch. She loved the veined hands with their heavy rings, the lace that draped her shoulders, and the large bonnet. Mr. Perry might not have approved the toilette, it was a little old-fashioned, a little dowdy, but Sarita scented the lavender about it, and loved it unconsciously for all it exemplified.

"Do you think I may help to nurse you?" she pleaded.

"Wouldn't you like to nurse me, instead?" Lord Northbury interposed. He was a chartered libertine, and even Lady Fortive's presence could not repress his desire to make Sally talk to him, and smile at him again.

"Not a bit." He got his smile. "I wish you would go away. I'm sure she would rather be alone, wouldn't you?"

"Of course she would, and I will take charge of you. I see you don't like Victor. We will leave him with the invalid; he is a splendid nurse, notorious for his gentleness with women. . . ."

"No, no, cousin, I am just the person to go round the garden with you. I'm fond of flowers, and all that sort of thing. Jack here is a mere ruffian compared to me."

"Don't you believe him, Lady Kidderminster. I'm a *preux* chevalier, a Bayard . . ."

Lady Fortive had been revived by the stimulant:

"The child hardly understands your irresponsible chatter, Jack, Victor. But she is quite right; you are rather too much for me, just yet! Will you call Mary," she asked. "I think my drive has rather over-tired me."

Whilst she was waiting for the maid she kept the conversation in her own hands. She recognized the note that infuriated Gilbert. When at length the maid came out with the footman to help wheel the couch, she noted Sarita's wistful face.

"You do not wish to stay and listen to Jack's nonsense, do you? Come in with me, out of the sun."

Sally followed her gladly. She did not want to talk to Lord Northbury, or to Victor Herold; she wanted to talk to Gilbert's mother. Her desire to be of use was strong, but it seemed there was nothing for her to do.

The couch was wheeled through the window into the dining-room — it was on large wheels and moved easily — then the carrying chair was brought in by the men. The maid helped Lady Fortive from one to the other; there was nothing in which Sally could help.

"I could lift you up and carry you in my arms," she said, "as easy as easy, like a baby. I should think you'd be more comfortable than in that thing."

"You follow, and see how carefully they take me."

If Lady Fortive, less impetuous, had not fallen in love with her daughter-in-law, she was undoubtedly touched by what she could see was the very genuine pity for her weakness that Sally showed. It was unusual. It was rather charming of this girl to seem to care. Lady Fortive's invalidism had lasted for so many years that it was taken as a matter of course by her friends.

Sally followed to the bedroom, and stood by whilst the bonnet and wraps were taken off.

"I won't go back to bed just yet," Lady Fortive told the maid. "I will sit in the easy chair by the window. You need not wait; Lady Kidderminster will stay with me." She smiled at Sally: "You will get me anything I may want, won't you?"

"Rather, I should think I would," Sally answered gratefully. "May I sit here, on this footstool at your feet? Then I can take them on my lap and warm them if they get cold. My feet used to get awfully cold after I broke my leg, when I couldn't get about."

"Sit by my side instead. I want to look at my new daughter-in-law."

Sally faced her, standing:

"This isn't my best dress, I didn't stop to change." Then she sank down on her knees, quite naturally.

"You will try and like me, won't you? Gilbert wants it so badly. He didn't ought to have married me without asking you; he'd give anything if you could get to like me."

"I don't think I shall find it difficult." She laid a feeble hand on the bright hair, and it was soft under her hand.

"I'm not good enough for you; nor for him, for the matter of that . . ." Sally began.

"Tell me only one thing. Do you love him? Do you truly love my son?" she asked. Gilbert needed love; she felt very weak, very feeble, as if her own must leave him soon.

Sally's head went down, on to Lady Fortive's lap. Not even to herself had she voiced all she felt; it was difficult, and the words would not come.

"I'd die," she said slowly, with her face hidden, her voice muffled. "I'd die to save him one moment's pain. I'd go away now, this moment, if he wanted me to, or if it was best for him. I can't—I can't quite tell you what I feel about him, it is too big, it seems to grow and grow. And now . . ." her head went lower, the blush that she hid overspread to the roots of her hair, she was alone with Gilbert's mother, and she would let her see into her heart, "now that we are married, and I am one with him, I'm so proud . . . and so humble . . ."

It was too difficult, she could not explain; marriage had brought her new emotion, new development. She was proud, she was humble, the very essence of her had gone out to him, in love.

"Oh, yes; indeed, indeed I love him," she repeated, below her breath, her face still hidden.

That is the way Kiddie found them when he rushed in. He had guessed where Sarita had gone when he had found the cards on the table, and the room empty.

"Isn't she a darling?" he cried triumphantly.

Sally jumped to her feet at the sound of his voice, but there was quick pleading in her eyes when they met Gilbert's mother's. They seemed to say, "Don't tell him I'm not."

"Indeed, she is," said Lady Fortive, and drew the girl to her again, kissing her, "indeed, she is."

Lady Fortive's suffrages were won with comparative ease. Sally's simplicity of diction, unworldliness, ignorance of common things, were as a gossamer veil beyond which shone her single-heartedness, and, like a cut diamond in the translucency of it, her love for Gilbert.

Lord Fortive's vote was secured differently.

He was due home on the twenty-seventh. Lady Fortive and her son, in consultation, agreed that it was well he should see Sarita for the first time at her very best! And Sally's "very best" was decided to be in evening toilette, her amazing hair parted in the middle, dressed loosely and simply in a Greek coil. The dress was to be of white *crêpe de Chine*, defining her slender figure. Lady Fortive would lend the famous rope of pearls; they were heirlooms, and both Kiddie and his mother thought they could never have graced a fairer neck.

Everything was arranged, the dress ordered from Paris, the pearls tried on, the hairdresser secured, a select little

company invited, and the dinner ménu passed. It had been difficult to get Kiddie to forget what his father had said, but it had not proved impossible. Nevertheless, Lady Fortive thought they should meet in company, that Lord Fortive should correct his impressions of his daughter-in-law before he and Gilbert had any conversation. She had an intuition that Sarita would make an immediate conquest, and that Gilbert in his pride, seeing it, would forget the untoward speeches, made, as she always reminded the boy, in complete ignorance of the circumstances. They had been directed toward an unknown personality, not Sarita.

But Sally upset all their calculations and rendered abortive all their plans. On the twenty-fifth she had a letter from Mary reminding her that the wedding was on the twenty-seventh, that she and Alf were longing to see her, that she had promised to come, and must not disappoint them!

"It won't be so grand an affair as you had, but Mrs. Stevens is spreading herself out on it; we're going straight on there, and she has asked a lot of people, Alf says. She thinks it will be good for the customers to know that 'Lady Kidderminster' is one of her son's wedding guests. Of course, that's not what me and Alf care about, but we always promised to be at each other's weddings. I don't believe you've grown too grand. . . ."

Sarita, receiving this epistle, in the early morning; there was a great deal more of it, by the way; put down her untasted cup of coffee, and looked at her husband:

"Lord, now," she said, "if I haven't gone and done it. Here's my new dress all wasted, and I can't be at that dinner-party after all!"

"What's up?" Kiddie asked calmly, buttering his toast. "What has happened? Miss Rugeley ill?"

"Not she; she is as hard as nails."

In a general way, Sally admired good health, and this was meant as a loyal tribute to her friend.

"No, it's nothing about Miss Rugeley, it's from Mary. She and Alf are going to be married on Thursday, and I've promised to go. I'd clean forgotten it. And the dinner is on Wednesday; what a pity your father couldn't have come a day or two earlier."

"Yes, it is a pity. But Mary and Alf might have sent round to the Foreign Office and announced their wedding; then they'd have let him off."

"You are laughing at me, I know, but I *do* think it a pity; he might have come to-day. Now I've got to miss seeing him, and everything."

"Don't be a little idiot."

"Aren't you disappointed?"

"What about?"

"About me not being there, and the dress, and the pearls she was going to lend me, and everything."

"Not a bit."

"You are unkind."

"You don't really suppose I'm going to let you race over to England to be at Alf and Mary's wedding! 'Alf' was the gentleman in the red jersey, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, that was Johnny Doone; Alf was at the factory, you know Alf and Mary—Mary Murray. She was my very best friend, I always promised to be at her wedding, I can't go back on her."

"You'll jolly well have to; you are talking through your hat. You know how important it is about my father."

"I can meet him any time." Then she smiled. "He wasn't so anxious about meeting me when he got the chance! I must go to Mary's wedding, anyhow."

It was the first approach they had had to a difference of opinion, although their wedding day was three weeks old.

Gilbert met her at first with ridicule, then with incredulity, finally with exasperation. Sally stuck to her guns; a promise was a promise, and she had promised to be at Mary's wedding.

"You seem to have no sense of your position," he said to her at last, besides one or two other hard things.

The guests had been invited, and had accepted; there was some excuse for Gilbert's temper. His mother was making the effort to please him, she was hardly fit to entertain. The whole plan of campaign had been made for Sarita's formal introduction to what relatives there were in Monte Carlo, and, above all, to her father-in-law.

When Gilbert had said all the harsh things that his exasperation prompted, he flung himself out of the room, completely baffled by Sally's inability to see how absolutely impossible was this scheme upon which she had set her heart. He went over to consult his mother in the emergency:

"You'll go by yourself if you go at all," were his last words.

And Sally, fully believing he meant them, desperately unhappy, but quite sure she must keep her word to Mary, began to pack her box. A few tears may have been packed along with those new dresses, although tears had not been Sally's way:

"Right's right, whether I'm Lady Kidderminster or Sally Snape, and it can't be right to break my given word to Mary," she said to herself convincingly. But, however conscious she was of rectitude, she knew she hated vexing Gilbert and disappointing his mother, and not wearing the pearls, and everything. The tears dropped into the trunk, and her eyelids grew red and swollen. She looked her very worst when she put on her travelling things, they were the same in which she had made that eventful first journey to Paris, and went out to secure her ticket.

She did not mean to say good-bye to anybody. If Gilbert did not come home before the afternoon train went, then she would leave him a note. She would tell him she would not stay away a moment longer than she need, she would sign herself "your very loving wife." She was his very loving wife; she could not keep the tears from welling up at the thought he was angry with her, and that she was going back to England without him.

Smith's Bank is almost next door to the International Sleeping Car Company, where she knew tickets were to be bought. Her self-absorption prevented her seeing Victor Herold standing at the door; she did not recognize the tall, distinguished-looking man, in grey felt hat and travelling tweeds, who was talking to him.

"They don't expect me until to-morrow," Lord Fortive was saying, "I got away sooner than I expected. I have brought Bystairs back with me; he has gone up to prepare them."

"You got all you wanted at the bank?"

"Yes, thanks."

Victor caught sight of Lady Kidderminster. She seemed a little uncertain of her way. The clerk at the bureau was a Frenchman, and Sally found it difficult to make him understand what she wanted.

"Can I be of any use?" he asked her. And Lord Fortive wondered who the good-looking girl might be to whom Victor was so attentive.

He asked him, lightly, when he came back from translating Sally's requirements. Victor had been too discreet to inquire why Lady Kidderminster was suddenly returning to England, why she was alone, and her eyes so red! But he was full of curiosity.

"You don't mean to say you don't know who she is?" he exclaimed.

"No, but I congratulate you on your good taste."

"*My* good taste! Kiddie's, you mean. It is your daughter-in-law."

"No!"

"That is Lady Kidderminster; you may take my word for it."

"Why, she is a mere child!"

Sally was waiting for her ticket, she looked and felt forlorn. She had had to accept Mr. Herold's help, for she could not get the French clerk to understand what she wanted, but she hated his manner, and his calling her "cousin," and the curiosity she saw in his eyes. Yet here he was by her side again.

"May I introduce . . . " he began.

"Thanks, Victor, but I will introduce myself."

Sally turned her back to them, she did not want to be introduced to anybody, she knew Gilbert would not wish her to be here alone, to be seen here alone. Victor laughed, but the other man came nearer to her, making her look round at him, as he took off his hat:

"I think you will allow me to introduce myself," he said to her.

Sally's intelligence was so seldom at fault; the smile, the voice, intuition, told her.

"I *do* believe," she exclaimed, and even her red eyes could not spoil the look she gave him. Smiles came all at once, and a weight of care seemed lifted from her shoulders.

"I do believe you're Gilbert's father! And you've come in time, after all." She heaved quite a sigh of relief. "It is you, isn't it?" she asked him.

"I am Lord Fortive. How did you guess?"

She put out both hands to him.

"Oh, I'm glad, I *am* glad. Gilbert was angry at my going away without seeing you, but I *had* to go."

Lord Fortive was no Stoic; he liked her gladness in recognizing him, and the difference between her manner to him and her manner to Victor. He liked—for who could help liking?—Sally's smile, the small hands he still held in his, the way her head was set upon her shoulders, the slim figure, and, yes, he was not quite sure at first, but he grew sure as he looked, he liked her red hair.

"And why were you running away? Why were you going without seeing me? What is the trouble?"

As Lord Fortive was saying to himself, *if* they were going to recognize the marriage, and do their best to get Gilbert's wife accepted, there was no sort of use in stumbling over the preliminaries. He came very definitely to this opinion as he stood just inside the shady and cool International Sleeping Car Office and listened to this exceedingly attractive young woman, whom he had just heard was his daughter-in-law.

He took the encounter lightly at first; it was amusing that he should have met her like this. He would have kept the conversation at a surface level, if Sarita had let him. He suggested that if she and Gilbert had had a difference of opinion, he might act as intermediary. He was even willing to include Victor in a little banter; he suggested they should all walk up to the Villa together and surprise the family.

But it was all too serious for chaff as far as Sally was concerned. She excluded Victor from her talk, which was all directed to Lord Fortive. If only she could make him say she was right!

The force of her personality won her the *tête-à-tête* she wanted. She found herself walking up the gardens alone with Kiddie's father, pouring out her trouble to him:

"I know Gilbert was right in not wanting to disappoint you again, and Lady Fortive, who has been so awfully

good to me. But what *was* I to do, seeing that I'd promised Mary . . . ?"

Lord Fortive listened, sometimes as he listened he looked. Her colour came and went in her distress and earnestness, and her sweet lips quivered. It was so hard to go "contrary" to Gilbert; it was so impossible to break her promise to Mary; her eyes appealed to him for judgment. The walk was all too short.

As Lord Fortive said afterwards, and really he only repeated Kiddie's words:

"It is her character that counts. She has a man's sense of honour, coupled with a child's unconsciousness of expediency; the boy has not been such a fool as I thought. We must do the best we can for them. I think well of her that she was not to be moved from her promise to her old friend Mary. They will be back at the end of the week, and we will have that dinner-party then."

For Kiddie did actually take Sarita to England in time for the wedding, and at his father's request! It is even now historical in Camden Town how Lord and Lady Kidderminster came to the wedding of Alf Stevens, son of that Mrs. Stevens who kept the chandler's shop, and how his lordship made a speech, and said he hoped he would be invited there again, for he'd never sat down to a finer feast, nor had a heartier welcome.

It is all historical now. For Lord and Lady Kidderminster are prominent in society at the moment, and the history of the marriage is told with a thousand variations. But in all essentials it is just as I have set it down, neither more complicated nor more simple.

The Fortives, according to their friends, made the best of a bad business. The public could not be expected to know that within a year, when Kiddie won the Malling seat, and had made his maiden speech in the House, when Sally

proved her quality, and they had learnt to know her, the Fortives had already begun to think that the marriage was anything but a bad business.

They had taken the young couple under their protection, and created a background for them. It was a background Sally Snape had always needed; her outlines were too sharp and clearly defined, the whole picture of her was Pre-Raphaelitish in its decorative simplicity. But the connoisseurs, who know the aims of the Pre-Raphaelites, recognize the qualities in young Lady Kidderminster that underlie all fine art — truth and simplicity. She has her critics, of course, and possibly they will be justified in their criticisms. Nevertheless, they leave untouched that which lies at the core of her, sound and sweet.

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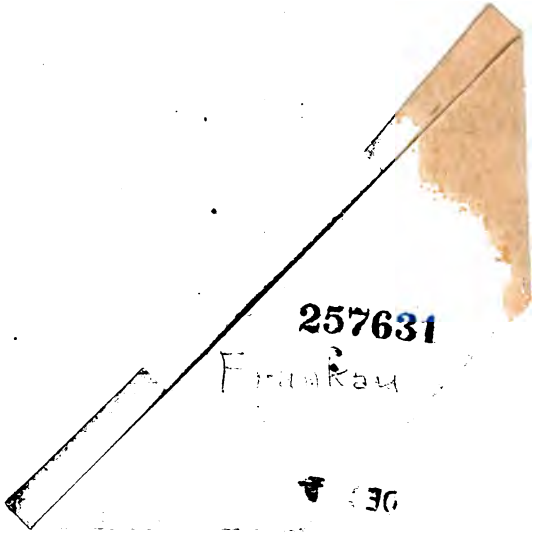
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